

# **LIVING A REFLECTIVE LIFE**

A thought experiment on the foundations of professional practice

Master's Thesis

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# 1. WHAT THIS WORK IS ABOUT

Back in 2018, when I began my graduate education in Helsinki, I grew quite fond of the spirit that carried the work inside the university and across its larger organizational ecosystem. There was a widely shared sense of well-intentioned pragmatism in approaching problems and conceiving solutions. One of the terms that captured this spirit and hence resonated well with me was ‘meaningful innovation’. And so, it came only naturally to return to this term when it was time to think of possible themes for this work. This led to questions, beginning with the question what the term ‘meaningful innovation’ could mean in the first place. Obviously, ‘meaningful’ here implies something other than a reminder that innovations should best avoid being nonsensical; much rather, it is meant in a way similar to when a person says that she wishes to live a meaningful life. Innovation, of course, is more than a private affair, so that the aspiration here seems to be a meaningful life for entire communities; a hope for a world that is in some sense better than other alternatives. But if the idea of ‘meaningful innovation’ entails a vision of a different world, what justifies us in calling it a ‘better’ one? In other words, what prevents those involved in the bringing about of innovations or other aspects of professional practice from superimposing their personal concerns onto the lives of those affected by their work, even or especially when the professional is concerned about a ‘meaningful’ outcome?

What I thus involved myself in was an inquiry into the normative foundations of professional practice, and writing a text about them is an almost strange endeavor because being socialized in the contemporary university system and work life, one might become convinced that there are none. Outside the sparse introductions to moral theories that sit like foreign bodies in systems restricted to the delivery of instrumental skills – bodies scrutinized only when the *modus operandi* of the system reveals shortcomings – there is little evidence that the adoption of professional roles in research or practice involved the affirmation of something deserving to be called a moral stance (see Beadle & Moore, 2006; MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002; MacIntyre, 2007; Moore & Grandy, 2017). And yet, there seems to be something of a paradox in the idioms of contemporary organizational life. Namely, the avoidance of *explicit* normative claims within conversation

among professionals stands in stark contrast with the abundance of *covert* normative claims: intrusive terms such as ‘good’ and ‘true’ are replaced by safe alternatives, such as ‘meaningful’ and ‘authentic’. While no innovation is ‘justified’, many are ‘valuable’. While few things are ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, a lot of things are ‘beneficial’ or ‘problematic’. While few professionals would dare to make claims about ‘the good life’, promises to increase ‘well-being’ are abundant. And so on. Perhaps the paradigmatic phrase here is ‘improving the status quo’; a highly neutral avowal to work towards a noncommittally better world. And while there is certainly nothing problematic with a careful rhetorical delivery of personal visions, the normative vacuum in some parts of institutional life seems all the stranger against the deafening backdrop of a public debate shaken by an increasingly unrelenting assertion of seemingly irreconcilable demands; a development that appears to threaten the very fundament of democratic societies as it makes its entrance into more and more slices of life. Now, these considerations provide little more than an unqualified hunch, but they serve to outline one of the starting points of this project: an inquiry into my own idiosyncratic versions of ‘improving the status quo’, into a set of normative convictions that I did not recognize as such. One was the conception of an ‘authentic life’ (see Camus, 2014; Heidegger, 2006; Yalom, 1980), and so, at the onset of this project, it seemed plausible to ask how that could be harnessed to substantiate a conception of ‘meaningful innovation’; a pairing to improve an integrated status quo of private and professional life. This inquiry was of course motivated by a question that is inevitably triggered at the end of one’s education – the question how to live.

Thinking about such questions is usually a hopelessly messy affair, and for this and other reasons we tend to declare their thematization unfit for ‘professional’ conversation in research and practice. This again does, if very preemptively so, positively characterize a part of the foundations of professional practice, and an essential part of this work is to substantiate this suggestion and show how these cultural habits might not be a very helpful response to the situation of life. In any case, asking how to live in professional environments is an odd undertaking, especially if the question is raised not only under the harmless pretext of preferences but under that of responsibility; yet what I wish to pursue in this work is a formalization of exactly this: an inquiry into the phenomenon of reflecting on one’s life and its implications on the normative foundations

of professional practice. For reasons that I hope become clear over the course of this work I no longer find such phrases as ‘authentic life’ or ‘meaningful innovation’ helpful; on the contrary, I find their unquestioned affirmation untenable (see Rorty, 1989). Instead, I want to ask what it could mean to *live a reflective life*, both in the sense of what meaning this phrase could have and in the sense of what aspiring to such a conception might imply for the life of the individual professional or entire communities, and how this might change the perspective on commitments to ‘improve the status quo’.

This endeavor necessarily confronts one with another omnipresent yet evasive matter: the capacity to reflect on oneself and other things. This phenomenon is discussed in different branches of philosophy (Dewey, 1910; Dretske, 2005; Frankfurt, 2004a; Goldie, 2002; Heidegger, 2006; Korsgaard, 2009; Shoemaker, 1988; Tugendhat, 1979; Zahavi, 2005), but it is also not foreign to the scholarly discussions on professional practice and organizational life (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cope, 2003; Hébert, 2015; Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Schön, 1983; Weick, 2002). In fact, in many such instances it is crucially mounted to articulate the speaker’s methodological or normative tenets (see Alvesson, 2003; Barge, 2004; Cunliffe, 2016; Fook & Askeland, 2007), so that the respective discussions serve as crowded runways for various collections of ‘improving the status quo’. These different conversations, however, occur in relative isolation, and the definitory lines between rival conceptions of reflection are drawn somewhat arbitrarily. We could say that there is a conceptual problem here, which is to say that it is unclear what we mean when we speak of reflection (see Farrell, 2012; Hébert, 2015). The concerns internal to my personal inquiry thus coincide with an extended problem of clarifying the phenomena they rest upon, as encountered across different domains of scientific inquiry. Consequently, what I want to provide in this text is an account that clarifies what capacities a person exercises and refers to when she says such things as ‘I need to take a step back and make up my mind’ (see Farrell, 2012) and how these different capacities – reflection and deliberation, just to name them here – are at work when a person engages in the larger effort of making up her mind on how to live.

On that basis, I will address a second set of questions that are deeply tied to the general problem of ‘improving the status quo’: the question of how specific forms of reflection and deliberation make it possible to evaluate normative claims, and to what degree these capacities are themselves something that we can attribute normative or methodological merit to. This is precisely what many scholars effectively do (see Fortin & Fellenz, 2008; Gray, 2007; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015; Ripamonti et al., 2016), though, since reflection provides for an excellent instance of ‘improving the status quo’, these normative claims are seldomly put to sincere critical evaluation. In other words, there is a normative problem in that it is unclear in what sense we might be justified to say that someone ought to reflect on something. These two problems are interlinked insofar as the normative problem cannot be successfully approached without an adequate response to the conceptual problem; moreover, it seems that many conceptions of reflection are motivated at least partly by the respective scholar’s *de facto* stance on the normative problem.

To fully make sense of the existing debate on reflection, both problems therefore need to be addressed, and I will do so in several steps: First, I will, in the following chapter, substantiate these initial remarks and describe how the conceptual and normative problem manifest in the discussion on reflection and reflexivity among scholars of professional practice and organization science. I will structure this by providing a rough overview on the intellectual developments in the literature on reflection that shows how the originally predominant paradigms that equated ‘reflection’ with epistemological ideals have gradually been shifted or expanded to encompass all sorts of normative and methodological ideals.

In Chapter 3, I will prepare a systematic response to the problems outlined in Chapter 2 by highlighting some of the essential methodological complexities and particularities inherent to any discussion on the phenomenon of reflection as a provider of methodological and normative standards. I will also provide a short overview of the philosophical literature that provided the central ideas for this response as well as some tangible insights into how I worked with them on a methodical level.

Chapter 4 represents the core of this work as it features the theoretical development of an account that provides a definition of reflection and deliberation with a special emphasis on their

distinction, that discusses the social and practical dimension of these phenomena, and that clarifies what particular forms of reflection and deliberation are involved in efforts to make up one's mind on how to live, both individually and within one's social community. These efforts will culminate in a comprehensive answer on what the eponymous phrase 'living a reflective life' could mean, and this conception will make it possible to provide a detailed and systematic answer to the conceptual problem and its manifestation in the literature, in that the different notions of reflection at use there can be located on some level of this conception and thus explained in its terms. At the same time, it will prepare a discussion of the normative problem in Chapter 5.

There, I will describe the interconnections between what I referred to as the normative problem and the general problem of 'improving the status quo', i.e., I will discuss how the frustration of particular expectations towards the potential of reflection and deliberation to reliably evaluate normative claims motivates individuals and communities to partly abandon the exercise of these capacities, leading to a strangely dichotomic situation with emphatic appraisals of reflection as a normative or methodological ideal on one side, and a lack of conversation on why any such claims should be accepted on the other. In other words, I will utilize the conceptual work done in Chapter 4 to engage in a discussion on the prospects and complications of a critically reflective conversation on life in the context of professional practice and organizational life, which is, at the same time, a subset of a larger discussion on what drives the problem of 'improving the status quo', of what leads us to make normative claims without fully appreciating that we do.

This discussion will be open-ended in that I will not attempt to provide a definitive normative account of reflection, but I will use the considerations entertained there to return, in Chapter 6, to the discussion from Chapter 2 and provide some suggestions on what motivated the tendency to equate reflection with different epistemological and normative ideals over the course of its thematization by scholars of professional practice, alongside with a few suggestions for possible avenues for future conversation about the underlying phenomena, as well as some food for thought on the general implications of this work. I will then end on a personal reflection on this work.

## **2. THE PROBLEMS IN THE LITERATURE ON REFLECTION**

I want to initiate this investigation with a brief account of some dominant conceptions of reflection at play in business and design literature as well as of the major intellectual developments surrounding these. Specifically, I want to focus on two problems that I will address over the course of the investigation: I refer to these problems as the conceptual and the normative problem of reflection. What I mean by the prior is that it is unclear what we mean when we talk about reflection, what I mean by the latter is that it is unclear if we should think of reflection as something generally desirable, something that the members of a community should therefore be encouraged to engage in. Since it is impossible to evaluate the normative merits of something that is not clearly understood and since a good part of the conceptual developments have been motivated by normative concerns, explicit or implicit, these two problems have to be looked at as intertwined. I still believe it is helpful to speak of two distinct problems here, not least because this distinction accounts for the structure of the investigation in that I will present a response to the conceptual problem in Chapter 4, and a response to the normative problem in Chapter 5.

### **2.1. THE CONCEPTUAL PROBLEM OF REFLECTION**

Reflection is a phenomenon that has attracted widespread interest for its intimate involvement in methodological and normative thinking as relevant for the development or evaluation of methods in research and practice (Alvesson, 2003; Barge, 2004; Cope, 2003; Fook & Askeland, 2007; Gray, 2007; Reynolds, 1998; Ripamonti et al., 2016) or perspectives on organizational ethics (Fortin & Fellenz, 2008; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015) and research practice generally (Alvesson et al., 2008; Johnson & Duberley, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Weick, 2002). At that, a defining feature of the scholarly debate on reflection has been a difficulty to supply the conversation with a clear definition. This is not to say that there was not an abundance of more or less formal definitions and connotations available from extensive thematization, but if there is a consensus among scholars it is that there is no consensus on the exact meaning of the term ‘reflection’ (Farrell, 2012:8, Hébert, 2015:361). As a result, we are faced with a conceptual problem when talking



about the phenomenon: While we commonly use the term ‘reflection’, it is often unclear what exactly we mean when we do so. There is, however, at least a vague sense of where to look for the phenomenon: In many cases ‘reflection’ has been defined, straightforwardly, as thinking, though in ‘deep’ and ‘careful’ (Hébert, 2015:361) or some otherwise desirable ways. In fact, it is almost difficult to find an intellectual virtue that has *not* been associated with reflection: reflection means to ‘think intelligently’ and grants ‘freedom from routine behavior’ (Farrell, 2012:11; Dewey, 1910), it helps ‘individuals see how their beliefs and attitudes may be ideological illusions’ (Gray, 2007:497) to instead ‘generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action’ (Mezirow, 2000:7). The list could be continued, but what matters is that even narrow understandings of the concept – those that are closer to the one I will develop in this investigation, and that resemble, I believe, more accurately what we commonly refer to when using the term – incorporate or equate to some version of an *epistemological ideal*.

The problem with equating reflection to certain epistemological ideals is that, if anything, a clarification of the phenomenon of reflection should help us understand what thinking in ‘deep’ and ‘justified’ ways could mean, not the other way round. This is not to say that there have not been such attempts, and appraisals of the sort mentioned above stand, firmly or loosely, in a tradition originating from John Dewey who gave a descriptive account of what he identified as ‘reflective thought’ in *How we think* (1910). Dewey defined reflection as an ‘[a]ctive, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends’ (Dewey, 1910:6). Reflection is thus thought of as a strictly noetic activity with an intrinsic epistemic intent, the intent to generate truthful and coherent belief. It is furthermore thought of as an ordered, consequential activity (Dewey, 1910:2; Farrell, 2012:10). In Dewey, we thus find the idea of reflection as ‘intentional, systematic inquiry that is disciplined and that will ultimately lead to change and professional growth’ (Farrell, 2012:13). Its practical relevance consists in what might best be referred to as instrumental rationality; reflection is thought to be essential for goal-directed action since it means to deliberate on how to achieve pre-established purposes, it provides us with rationales to justify certain courses of action (Hébert, 2015:362). Dewey also noted that reflection is caused by the

unexpected, the sort of surprises that challenge previous sensemaking efforts (Hébert, 2015:362). This meant that the paradigmatic cases of reflection were to be found outside of behavior in accordance with routines and norms, and the combination of this exclusion and the instrumental orientation has earned Dewey the verdict that his conception ‘divorces values from methods’ (Hébert, 2015:364).

The identification of reflection with instrumental rationality becomes less strict in later conceptions that build on Dewey’s, most notably in that advanced by Donald Schön, who can safely be identified as the most influential proponent of this tradition within the domains of business and design. In Schön (1983), reflection is less explicitly (but no less emphatically) introduced as an epistemological ideal; it runs here under the descriptive label of an ‘epistemology of practice’ (p.133). A central concern of Schön is the contrasting of ‘reflection-in-action’ with ‘technical rationality’, the latter being a socially embedded ideal of instrumental rationality: according to this dogma, the different occupations available to the individual participating in work life are defined by the matching of means to ends established by the respective occupation, though a series of professions are singled out on the account that they, and only they, incorporate rigorous technical problem solving based on specialized scientific knowledge (Schön, 1983:21). The professions are thus defined as social roles that consist in the appropriation of scientific discoveries for the sort of instrumental reasoning called for by their domain. Schön’s mounting of reflection as a rival epistemological ideal now runs on the charges that, firstly, ‘when ends are confused and conflicting, there is as yet no “problem” to solve’, and, secondly, that, where roles and domains conflict, the application of expertise has to be made possible by means that transcend the boundaries of this expertise (Schön, 1983:41) – in both instances the ideal of technical rationality falls short, but the argument is now that these instances define to a large extent the ‘problems of greatest human concern’ (Schön, 1983:42). The reality of successful professional practice, Schön argues, much rather consists in what he calls ‘reflection-in-action’, which is contrasted with Dewey’s model in that it poses a form of ‘inquiry [that] is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends’ (Schön, 1983:68) and in that it relies on tacit and implicit knowledge and thus often remains unarticulated; it is ‘in the

doing' (Hébert, 2015:364; see Farrell, 2012:13). It is important to highlight that reflection in Schön is still seen through the lens of systematic knowledge creation, and thus thought of as an 'on-the-spot (as opposed to in retrospect) process of surfacing, testing, and evaluating intuitive understandings which are intrinsic to experience' (Reynolds, 1998:186). The contrast with technical rationality in particular, and positivist epistemology in general, is provided by Schön's claim that the latter are rooted in a 'separation of means from ends', 'research from practice', and 'knowing from doing' (Schön, 1983:165); and against these he mounts his conception of reflection that is, as an essential aspect of problem solving, concerned with the identification and recognition of problems (Schön, 1983:129) and that accentuates the practical and experiential nature of the process as part of which this occurs in a professional's work (Schön, 1983:163).

On this basis, Schön pays special attention to the interplay between reflective activity and its social context in that he maintains that the different entities that define institutional life, such as roles, systems of norms and games, and organizational planning come with a tendency to prevent and immunize themselves against reflective activity (Schön, 1983:235,265,327). On the other hand, 'role-frame remains relatively constant from situation to situation, it bounds the scope of practice and provides a reference which allows a practitioner to build a cumulative repertoire of exemplars, facts, and descriptions' (Schön, 1983:274), making it a possible theme of reflection (Schön, 1983:235). For the professional aspiring to be a 'reflective practitioner' this implies a 'task of reshaping [...] norms and expectations' (Schön, 1983:303), i.e., the augmentation of institutional conditions to make possible and liken reflective activity on the part of all those participating (Schön, 1983:306). On the organizational level this implies a generally increased level of flexibility, but most importantly an awareness of and openness for 'conflicting values and purposes' (Schön, 1983:338). The latter is an important step since it equates reflection with a form of (articulated and non-articulated) deliberation that is not merely instrumental; reflection may well encompass questioning the ends of a certain action. Schön still thinks of reflection as a methodologically informed epistemic activity with a natural intent: 'to guide further action towards the best (rationally verified) goal' (Hébert, 2015:367). There is a continuity then in the tradition from Dewey to Schön in that reflection is thought of as a goal-directed form of deliberation whose

criteria are posed by a general orientation towards truth and by a set of practical concerns established by a social context.

Since Schön and Dewey a number of conceptual developments have occurred, and they partly consist in the modification of the original epistemic orientation towards a normative one, but this is something I want to discuss in more depth in the next section. On the conceptual level, the perhaps most important development has been the complementation and partial substitution of the term ‘reflection’ for the term ‘reflexivity’. To see what authors mean when they use the term ‘reflexivity’, let us look at one example. Building on the incorporation of ends into reflective thinking discussed above, Ripamonti et al. (2016) understand ‘reflexivity’ as questioning what’s taken for granted, but they introduce and distinguish it from ‘reflection’ as such:

Ontologically, reflexivity is situated within social constructionism, which is based on the assumption that our social world does not exist independently from us [...]. *Reflexivity* acknowledges that we shape and make meaning about our world from within while *reflection* is about taking ourselves outside of a social world that is external to us to analyze it from an objective stance. (Ripamonti et al., 2016:57)

The first thing that needs to be addressed when discussing this admittedly obscure statement, is this: If the concepts of reflexivity and reflection presuppose rival ontologies, they cannot be used compatibly. So rather than a distinction between two terms we are faced here with a transformation of a term’s meaning that has led to the replacement of the term. The meaning of the above statement then is that the transformation of the concept of reflection to that of reflexivity was driven by the replacement of the ontological commitments that came with theories built around the division of phenomena into the spheres of subject and object (such as the Cartesian and other ‘representationalist’ traditions) by those that came with theories which sought to eliminate such division (broadly, those traditions that featured some version of a ‘linguistic turn’).<sup>1</sup> Let us ignore the problem that the authors’ distinction of the two terms

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<sup>1</sup> This development was already sketched out in Schön’s conception who underpinned his advocacy for reflection on roles and meaning frames with the note that they formed part of a social reality constructed by the individual’s

requires the affirmation of just such a subject-object ontology (it supplies the meaning of the terms ‘within’ and ‘outside’) and is thus rooted in precisely the commitments they want to reject, and acknowledge that the notion of ‘questioning what’s taken for granted’ does, at first, not necessitate any of these ontological commitments. To say that the term reflexivity is ‘situated’ in some tradition then does not mean that it becomes intelligible only under the pretext of the ontological commitments characteristic to this tradition, but that the tradition accounted for the larger historical development of ideas that the term’s transformation occurred in; specifically, that scholars who refer to ‘reflexivity’ rather than ‘reflection’ tend to have involved themselves in this development and have therefore come to *apply* the term to the sort of problems that arose from the implications of the tradition.

This is a rather awkward way of introducing a methodically and thematically central term, not only because it puts a burden on those to use the term to familiarize themselves with the historical development of a series of (incredibly complex) intellectual traditions, but mostly because it makes the meaning of the term contingent on whatever interpretations form the outcome, which is inconsistent with the fact that introducing a term in such a way is possible only under the pretext of some taken-for-granted definition (in this case: reflection as the evaluation of attitudes held by individuals or groups)! Now, this is just one example but it is paradigmatic in that it shows that the discussion on reflection and reflexivity suffers from a convolution of metatheoretical commitments that can obstruct inquiries into the phenomena that form its theme. The tragedy here is that this often works against the authors intentions; it makes conveying ideas that matter harder and more obscure, rather than easier and more precise.

The plethora of meanings associated with both terms does not surprise if one recognizes that, like ‘reflection’, the term ‘reflexivity’ is used with reference to taken-for-granted meanings that often continue to be in use implicitly, producing equivocations wherever applications of the term are relocated onto the definitory level. Originally, ‘reflexivity’ refers to a *relational property* such that we call something ‘reflexive’ when it stands in some relation to itself (Tugendhat, 1979:155) – in

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affirmation (Schön, 1983:310) – but here the conclusion was simply that institutional entities were available themes of reflection, not a redefinition of the term itself.

itself it therefore does not denote any concrete phenomenon. Like equality and other relational properties, it can be invoked in virtually any instance in which phenomena of any sort can be interpreted as demonstrating a certain relation (one that they have with themselves). This has spawned the birth of a whole family of ‘reflexivities’, at home in different disciplines and traditions. Lynch (2000) offers a taxonomy of the term (see also Johnson and Duberley, 2003), part of which I want to cite here: The different variants reach from ‘mechanical reflexivity’ – understood as a ‘recursive process that involves feedback’ which can be found both in forms of ‘habitual, thoughtless, instantaneous response’ in human behavior and in infinite regresses such as self-calling functions in machine behavior (Lynch, 2000:27) – to ‘substantive reflexivity’, which denotes the idea that the reality of some social institutions, such as money, is constituted by their constant affirmation (Lynch, 2000:28). ‘Hermeneutical reflexivity’ on the other hand, denotes that a ‘reader’s presumption about what a text can mean reflexively inform the temporal effort to make out what it does mean’ (Lynch, 2000:32), while ‘methodological reflexivity’ categorizes efforts to self-insight and a critical awareness of one’s own beliefs (Lynch, 2000:29). It is the latter that is most intimately tied to reflection and that has, as the denotation suggests, been influential in methodological discussions, so that reflexivity in organizational literature is often understood in this way.

To substantiate this claim, let us take a brief look at how scholars within organizational research talk about reflexivity in the context of their work. Reflexivity is understood here as the reflexivity of research as a social practice and that chiefly entails the demand that research practices incorporate a (critical) thematization of their own proceedings, standards, ideals, and social conditions; their institutional form if you will (Alvesson et al., 2008:480). This can imply several things, e.g., that research approaches – in particular, efforts of sensemaking and interpretation – are facilitated in a participatory manner (Alvesson et al., 2008:482); that a pluralism of paradigms is favored over one ‘single, favored angle and vocabulary’ (Alvesson, 2003:25; see Barge, 2004:71); or, as a consequence of both, that a plurality of interpretations is considered ‘to produce rich and varied results’ (Alvesson, 2003:25). This methodological orientation also ‘emphasizes that the researcher is part of the social world that is studied, and [that] this calls for exploration and self-

examination' (Alvesson, 2003:24), in particular with hindsight to 'how the researcher's assumptions, biases, personality, and presence alters what comes to be known during the inquiry' (Barge, 2004:70). On the level of the researcher, the demand at the center of this 'reflexive turn' thus spells out as such: '[I]n order to understand ourselves as management researchers we must engage with ourselves through thinking about our own thinking' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1279), and this is reinforced by the charge that to affirm 'unexamined metatheoretical commitments' is intellectually irresponsible (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1280). It is important to highlight that this demand will be understood differently with varying metatheoretical stances, and does not have to encompass all the commitments mentioned above: it can lead into more limited deliberation on how to remedy possible shortcomings of a designated methodology, or (as in Alvesson's case, arguably) lead into deliberation 'on the metatheoretical assumptions that justify the methodology in the first place' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1284).

Now, these points present us with a multi-faceted picture, but they clarify the usage of the term 'reflexivity' in organizational research to the degree that we can reintegrate it into our discussion on reflection. Realigning the discussions on reflexivity with those on reflection is still difficult in face of the plurality of understandings, but taking the points listed above as representative, we can broadly summarize their relation as such: there are a number of considerations on the *reflexivity* of research as a social practice, and among the consequences of these is a commitment on parts of the researcher to *reflect* on the context at hand, in particular on possible social issues. I would not have any objections to such a statement, but with respect to the conceptual problem of reflection the consequence is that the appeal to 'reflexivity', or even using it interchangeably with 'reflection', does not help us in clarifying the phenomenon of reflection; on the contrary, as in the case of equality, the plethora of meanings that can possibly associated with the notion of reflexivity invites for a jumble of overlapping, conflicting, or disconnected notions that can charge the term with metaphysical and normative preconceptions. After all, who would not advocate for more equality and reflexivity (see Hébert, 2015:361)? But it is important to recognize that these concepts are phenomenally empty and thus meaningless if it is not specified what it is that is (descriptively or normatively) supposed to be reflexive or equal. The intellectual pitfall here is that

if such task is skipped, the conversation is prone to drifting into associative pseudo-discussion. Consequently, the use of the term has sparked warnings and criticism such as those voiced by Weick (2002) where a pointless self-occupation of researchers is presented as a collateral damage of the 'reflexive turn': 'Theorizing in organizational studies has taken an inward turn' (p. 893). The central argument here is: 'Attention to self makes for better theory, providing that attention is instrumental to spotting excluded voices and thinking more deeply about topics; it becomes a drag on theory development when the attention becomes an end in itself' (Weick, 2002:893). The ambiguity attested to reflexivity goes to encompass the claim that 'the ways in which reflexivity itself is constituted inevitably articulates epistemological circularity in that commentator's definitions and prescriptions vary according to their metatheoretical commitments' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1279). The underlying argument is that the criteria to assess any theory are subject to a theory (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1281), and we will meet this argument in different variations throughout the investigation, as it has been made by numerous authors in different ways (Frankfurt, 2004a; Heidegger, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007; Rorty, 1983; Tugendhat, 1979), so we will come to see in greater detail where this circularity stems from and what complications it implies. For now, let us note that 'reflection' and 'reflexivity' are often used as buzzwords (see Hébert, 2015:362), so that in a range of cases, these terms are simply used by the speaker to avow their personal methodological or normative ideals. In many such cases, the terms may not denote any specific phenomenon (or anyways, it does not matter to the argument the author wishes to present), and the reader may be best advised so simply look past the usage of the term and instead pay attention to how the authors have themselves defined it to see what is really meant.

The conceptual problem of reflection, as manifest in the business and design literature, then is this: Reflection is a phenomenon that has been hard to grasp and with which a plethora of meanings have been associated and this has made discussion on the underlying phenomenon difficult. The conceptual history of the phenomenon's discussion can broadly be described as a successive widening of the term's extension to satisfy all sorts of methodological and normative commitments. This is not surprising, since if reflection is the acknowledged hallmark of thinking in desirable ways, what researcher would not be delighted to see their methodological ideals



included in the definition. In contrast to these responses that effectively see reflection as too narrow an ideal, I suggest that even the original epistemic orientation that identified reflection with a form of problem framing and solving or knowledge, or that made knowledge a condition of application for reflection put a descriptive burden on the phenomenon itself which, I believe, it does not warrant. This is not to say that there are not forms of reflection whose importance for the pursuit of a community's epistemic and normative concerns cannot be overstated, but it does not help to recognize a phenomenon only in those cases where it does what one wants it to. Appreciating reflection for the phenomenon that it is, I will argue, will lead one to locate those 'deep', 'critical', and 'productive' forms of reflection within a larger spectrum that equally comprises all sorts of 'shallow', 'uncritical', and 'unproductive' ways of reflecting on oneself and the world. This is, broadly, what I will try to provide in Chapter 4, and it is important to highlight here that I will not rely, in this effort, on the texts discussed so far. Instead, the goal is to develop an account that offers itself as an alternative to ground the sort of debates alluded to, and to approach this task I will rely on a number of texts from the realm of analytic and phenomenological philosophy (I will discuss this in the next chapter). The reason is that the phenomenon at the center of the account I wish to present – reflection as an activity to thematize one's own attitudes – is, in its intricacies, largely overlooked by business and design literature, even by those authors who explicitly address the concepts of 'reflection' and 'reflexivity'.

## **2.2. THE NORMATIVE PROBLEM OF REFLECTION**

Insofar as reflection refers to particular forms of (cooperative) activity, it is possible to ask whether it is desirable for an individual or a group to engage in such forms of activity; and the question whether we can generally answer this question affirmatively and whether it is therefore warranted for a community to hold that its members ought to engage in certain forms of reflection is what I mean when I speak of the normative problem of reflection. This question is often answered implicitly, in that, as we saw, reflection tends to be equated with certain ideals on the definitory level. So far, I have been referring to some epistemic ideals the phenomenon has been associated with, but we will now come to see how the discussion on reflection and reflexivity has undergone

a ‘normative turn’ that has led to an equation of reflection with a number of *normative ideals*. Conceptually, this development often manifests as a distinction between ‘reflection’ and ‘critical reflection’ or ‘reflexivity’, or as a widening the extension of the term ‘reflection’ to encompass whichever socio-cultural phenomena the author wishes to thematize. The intellectual developments here are again complex and multi-faceted, so I will not be able to do more than highlight some of the trends that I think are important with respect to the normative problem.

As we saw, the methodological discussions on reflection already produced a number of normative considerations around the social roles of researchers and practitioners and their institutional context, but these only form the tip of the normative iceberg in the conversation. In fact, the normative underpinnings of the discussion on reflection were already pronounced in Dewey, whose account was motivated by a perceived ‘need for a thinking citizenry in a democratic society’ (Farrell, 2012:9). Nonetheless, the definitions of reflection introduced so far did not extend to any significant social dimension, leading commentators to remark, for example, that reflection in Schön had been limited to the perspective of the individual (Reynolds, 1998:186). We do, however, find the gateway to a full recognition of the social dimensions of reflection within business and design literature already there, as Schön makes what he referred to as ‘frames of meaning’ available as themes for reflection. This motif has been developed much further in the appropriation of reflection for a discussion on psychological transformation, which eventually paved the way for a discussion on the transformation of social environments.

Let us start with the prior by taking a brief look at Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. There, reflection is embedded in an anthropological conception as he maintains that ‘the human condition may best be understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings’ (Mezirow, 2000:3). Mezirow also offers a theory of how human beings generally organize meaning; the concept of ‘frame of reference’, which he defines as a ‘meaning perspective obtained from culture or idiosyncrasies of caregivers’, and this falls into the concepts of ‘habits of mind’ (sets of sociolinguistic, epistemic, philosophical, aesthetic, and other assumptions) which are again expressed as ‘points of view’ (sets of specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, judgements; Mezirow, 2000:16). On that basis, he develops a theory of learning which essentially

characterizes different modifications of these entities to organize and express meaning (Mezirow, 2000:19). An epistemic orientation enters the frame with the acknowledgement that '[o]ur understandings and beliefs are more dependable when they produce interpretations and opinions that are more justifiable or true than would be those predicated upon other understandings or beliefs' (Mezirow, 2000:4), and this is, unsurprisingly, where reflection, or rather 'critical reflection' comes into play. Specifically, 'critical reflection' here means 'becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation' (Mezirow, 2000:4). Conceptually, this is very much in line with what we have encountered in the previous section. The important step here is that the things available to reflect upon transcend the domain of professional practice and the individual's personal attitudes. Reflection is therefore no longer adequately described as an 'epistemology of practice', neither is Mezirow interested in developing a noetic taxonomy. Instead, his theory represents an 'attempt of relating reflection to learning' with different levels of reflectivity that culminate in the challenging of personal and psychological assumptions (Reynolds, 1998:192). The theory of transformative learning thus attempts to describe transformations of an individual's general self-understanding, including its outlook on social life, and, importantly, this process 'involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others' (Mezirow, 2000:8). From there, Mezirow moves on to describe the essential features and conditions of possibility for what he calls 'reflective discourse', which is a 'specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief' (Mezirow, 2000:10-11). Thus, the significance of Mezirow's theory in the context of our discussion is this: while we are, conceptually, still rooted in an epistemic conception of reflection as a form of deliberation governed by the search for justified belief, the means by which this search proceeds are expressively communicative (whereas Schön added the idea of a tacit version), and its arena encompasses the entirety of the individual's efforts to make sense of itself.

These considerations, combined with the earlier-encountered notion that the institutions to govern social life are born from and enforced through collective sensemaking efforts, finally bring us onto solid normative ground, where 'critical reflection involves the identification of deep-

seated assumptions, but with the primary purpose of bringing about some improvements in professional practice' (Fook & Askeland, 2007:521). Note in particular how Fook & Askeland redefine the notion of a transformation to suit their conception: 'What makes such reflection critical is the focus on power which allows the reflective process to be transformative' (2007:522), with the outcome that the essential criterium now is that critical reflection challenges cultures and norms. The distinction between this and the 'old' problem-solving type of reflection is seen as one of thematic context (Reynolds, 1998:183), although much has changed with respect to the intent of reflection, as seen through the lens of an aspiration towards 'a just and democratic society through reasoned conversation of the dominant, science-influenced rationality which privileges means over ends, facts over values' (Reynolds, 1998:187). This process coincides with an inclusion of emotion into the conception, taken as constituent of knowledge or driver of change (Fook & Askeland, 2007:527), driving home the union of epistemological and normative ideals. As such, accounts of 'critical reflection' complete a partial renunciation of the Deweyan roots of the concept, while paradoxically returning to the original motivation to thematize the phenomenon in the first place. The outcome is that to reflect to some authors now means to oppose 'the kinds of assumptions that foster the inevitability of authoritarianism in organizations, the unquestioned value attached to economic growth and the maintenance of inequality in wealth and privilege' (Reynolds, 1998:184).

More or less the same development happens, if perhaps more radically, within the discussion on 'reflexivity': here, the use of 'reflection' as an epistemological ideal has been looked at critically (Barge, 2004), only that the response (summarized simply) was to distinguish 'reflection', which 'pays little attention to [...] ideological and cultural aspects' (p.72) from 'reflexivity' which, as we saw above is free to be defined at the author's discretion, but the general tendency was to infuse the term with all sorts of aspects that the original concept had not 'paid attention to'. As 'critical reflection', the concept enters a social dimension, with 'reflexivity' being defined as 'Questioning what we, *and others* [emphasis added], might be taking for granted – what is being said and not said – and examining the impact this has or might have' (Cunliffe, 2016:741), though the original epistemic orientation is not lost here either as the normative focus is framed as a 'transformation

of knowledge to enable new practices' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1291). On such conceptions, a 'self-reflexive' person would be 'someone who is able to relate to others, to see what is wrong about her actions' (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015:180). The general function assigned to reflexivity thus is that of a normative corrective; consequently, it is hailed as a tool 'to develop ethically responsible, caring leaders and managers' (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015:177), as 'a useful response by researchers to the danger of committing the hypocrisy of organizational justice in research. Similarly, increased reflexivity by managers, including a look at their internal moral compass, can prevent them from committing hypocrisy in practice' (Fortin & Fellenz, 2008:31).

It is only consequent then that researchers of critical reflection and reflexivity have begun to approach these projects on a more than descriptive level by spearheading the development of 'reflexive practices' ranging from self-critical research methodologies to pedagogical programs that seek to facilitate responsibility assumption and critical self-awareness of the practitioner in her institutional context, e.g., through the use of writing and dialogue (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Ripamonti et al., 2016). This step also conceptually cements the departure from the original privative orientation, since: 'Critical reflection must be a social act of collective empowerment if it is to move beyond personal to social transformation' (Gray, 2007:497). The link of this to the normative turn is acknowledged when it is maintained that a concern for the normative dimension of reflection naturally promotes an interest in the communicative or 'relational' facets of reflective practices (Barge, 2004). These efforts are usually thematized with respect to their institutional environment, so that, for instance, the need for a dedicated installment of a culture suitable for hosting the respective practices is maintained (Fook & Askeland, 2007:530). As we saw, this line of thinking was already present in Schön, but it is further specified by Mezirow's ideas on the conditions of possibility of reflective discourse, such as 'access to accurate information, freedom from coercion, an ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively as well as openness to other perspectives and ideas' (Fook & Askeland, 2007:530).

It is important to highlight that such practical efforts, which close the gap between organizational research and pedagogy, tend to be embedded in larger interpretations of reflection or reflexivity within the life of the researcher or practitioner: 'Being reflexive is about having "a heart", it is not

a technique, but a way of being in relation with others that brings with it moral and ethical considerations' (Cunliffe, 2016:745). To summarize, the result of this enrichment with further methodological programs and normative standards is that 'reflexivity' advances to a quasi-life conception; so that it finally is referred to as 'a way of being that involves questioning who we are in the world and how we can act in responsible and ethical way' (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015:180). From a certain standpoint the normative turn is brought to completion here. The outcome is that 'being reflexive' (the replacement of 'reflection' is consequent in this case, since the discussion no longer centers around particular forms of activity but the life conceptions to govern them) simply means 'being a good person'. The term, used in this way, has the function of an avowal and concurrent normative endorsement of personal attitudes.

The primary problem in using the term in this way is a possible dependency 'on particular conceptions of human nature and social reality with an unreflective counterpart' (Lynch, 2000:26). For this reason, Lynch (2000) advocates for a narrower definition of the term on the account that it 'avoids the academic pretensions and fractiousness that can arise from equating reflection with a certain intellectual orientation, cultural condition or political perspective' (p.27). What's more, these commitments stand in stark contrast to what some researchers identify as the consequences of the reflexive turn: 'Researchers find themselves stuck in reflexive acts, unable to see anything but doubt and relativity at the core of the human condition' (Weick, 2002:893). Here, rather than with a justified life conception, reflexivity is associated with relativism, both epistemological – 'Relativism asserts that nothing is certain. Reflexivity asserts that nothing is certain, not even that assertion.' (Weick, 2002:894) – and normative – 'All knowledge projects are "dangerous" insofar as any version of truth carries with it a particular freezing of the social world and a configuration of political privileges.' (Alvesson et al., 2008:482). On such accounts, the fate of the reflexive researcher ready to 'negate the world as an objectively accessible social reality and denaturalize hegemonic accounts by exposing their modes of social organization' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1288) might be an 'endless autopoietic process where post-modernists continuously deconstruct their own deconstructions of themselves within a recursively closed cognitive system' (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1287), and this culminates in

verdicts no less emphatic than normative appraisals of reflexivity when the discussion is characterized as ‘Narcissism run amok, although it is even worse than that. Narcissus at least did recognize himself’ (Weick, 2002:894). The factual result of seemingly constructive demand for things such as a ‘monitoring of the researchers of her behavioral impact upon the social settings under investigation so as to eradicate methodological lapses’ (Johnson & Duberley, 2003:1285) is thus described as such: ‘The tacit prescription is that people should be more mindful of their tacit practices of theorizing, but this escalates into being stuck in self-reflection’ (Weick, 2002:894).

The normative problem of reflection then manifests in an even more precarious situation than the conceptual problem. On one side, we are faced with a habit in academia and ordinary language of singling out particular members from a larger set of phenomena exhibiting reflexive traits and designating them as reflection or reflexivity per se, thus revealing an epistemic and normative preoccupation many speakers have when approaching the phenomenon. On the other side, the practical consequence of an embrace of the phenomenon is held to be disorienting to a degree that it makes normative justification altogether impossible. Taken together, the two problems present us with a bit of a mess, but, owing to the definitory problems discussed in the last section and what is possibly at stake, this should not surprise. If anything, the relativistic charge reinforces that what the normative turn aims to solve by definitory assertion would need to be part of a debate on the phenomenon of reflection. It underscores the need to ask what we mean when we say, for instance, that we need to reflect on something, and it underscores that a rigorous discussion of the question ‘Ought we engage in reflection?’ cannot simply be skipped.

These are the questions that I want to address in the following investigation and coming up with a satisfactory definition of reflection forms of course very much the core of this work, so I do not want to present one here. But I do want to make one early restriction: For the reasons discussed in the last section, I believe that the term ‘reflexivity’ makes for an exceptionally bad starting point for such an endeavor. Furthermore, based on the considerations entertained in this section, it appears clear to me that what scholars of reflection and reflexivity are ultimately concerned with are deliberate forms of behavior exercised by beings that warrant to be classified as moral agents; else, any descriptive or prescriptive discussion of reflective practices, and any kind of normative

discussion for that matter, simply would not make any sense. So, the first restriction is that we will need to talk about reflection as a (human) activity. A paradigmatic reference to such forms of activity would be a sentence such as ‘I need to step back and reflect on where I have been, where I am now, and where I want to go with reflective practice and to redefine what it really means to me’ (Farrell, 2012:8). This does not discard reflexivity as a possibly important concept, but if there are relational properties of such kind involved (there are), they will have to be found in the sphere of the phenomena that pertain to a discussion of reflection as an activity.

Having made this restriction, let me summarize the type of response to the existing debate I aspire to in this text: The habit of equating the phenomenon of reflection to theoretical and practical ideals warrants caution and dedicated thematization, not least because thinking of reflection in such way tragically runs counter to an appreciation of its critical potential. Instead, what I think one is committed to, for a defense of the normative and epistemic merits of reflection, is a conceptual account of the phenomenon that clarifies *how exactly* the activity of reflection is (or is not) conducive to a critical awareness of one’s own beliefs, intentions, and so on, and can thus carry the forms of inclusive, empathetic, and rational conversation that are indispensable for cooperation, in particular within free societies. Reflection then has to be seen not as a mysterious guarantor for a profound justified view of the world, rather it must be acknowledged that each individual reflects in manifold ways and that, among them, there are ways to do so that foster transparency and cooperative bonds between members of a community, and whose actualization is therefore in the community’s interests. In other words: I do not disagree with the general tendency in academia and practice to suggest that the phenomenon of reflection can function as a provider of theoretical and practical ideals, but an understanding of these (and therefore, a sincere conversation on their general desirability) is only possible if their origin is made transparent on the grounds of an accurate and accessible description of the underlying phenomenon. If such thematization is foregone and not made available for conversation, the term is effectively used as an uncritical affirmation of the speaker’s preconceptions, as their idiosyncratic versions of ‘improving the status quo’. Hence, my suggestion is that the normative problem needs to be raised and answered on the basis of an answer to the conceptual problem.



An attempt to provide the latter therefore makes up my central contribution to the conversation, but I will move from there to address the normative problem directly. The transition from a descriptive to a normative perspective is complex and for various more or less obvious reasons problematic, therefore I do not hope to present a conclusive answer to the normative problem in this text. There is also a fundamental problem with appeals to reflection as a source of normative legitimacy without a due attempt at a general critique of the sources of legitimacy; it thus seems to me that appealing to reflection to justify one's beliefs and intentions in particular, or one's life conception in general is self-defeating if it happens outside the context of a certain type of reflective conversation on the normative foundations of practice. Much rather than providing us with a morally justified outlook on life, I will argue, the normative merit of particular forms of reflection lies in making such conversation possible. For the investigation that means that, rather than by providing some definitive account, I want to address the normative problem by means of a discussion that will eventually lead us back to the theoretical developments discussed in this chapter.

### **3. SOME PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS**

I ended the previous chapter on the note that the intention to use the concept of reflection as a methodical key term to facilitate a conversation on the normative foundations of professional practice and organizational life commits one to define this concept on the basis of an investigation into the underlying phenomenon. This is precisely what I will attempt to provide in this work. At first, this investigation consequently being a purely conceptual work, it might appear that there is not much to say about the methodology then, other than that I will draw from conceptions found in philosophical literature to engage in a detailed discussion of the underlying phenomenon and compare the result with the conceptions encountered in the scholarly discussion on reflection in professional practice. Of course, even or especially a purely conceptual endeavor still has metatheoretical presuppositions and methodological criteria, and as became apparent already in the previous chapter, any conception of reflection and reflexivity is confronted with some very particular problems in this regard. The reason for the methodological centrality and complexity of reflection and reflexivity results from the fact that they are themselves conceptual providers or representations of methodological, epistemological, and normative ideals. Approaching the phenomenon with a pre-established methodology is therefore precarious and I will address some of the problems that come with this in this chapter, albeit I will only be able to do so tentatively, and we will return to the methodological complications throughout the investigation. Apart from this, I will also give a brief overview on the methodical steps taken to approach this work.

#### **3.1. THE GOAL OF A PHENOMENALLY GROUNDED ACCOUNT**

I already mentioned one specific methodological complexity for any discussion on reflection in the previous chapter: the problem of epistemological and normative circularity. The argument, again, is that there can be no theory-neutral criteria to evaluate whether a theoretical account warrants to be associated with an ‘objective’ reality or morality because any criteria to evaluate such claims again presuppose some theory (Johnson & Duberly, 2003:1281; Van Maanen, 1995:134). Discussing this problem at length here is futile, as this question can ultimately only be

answered by a complete theory of mind and language, which I obviously cannot offer. It is also important to emphasize here that we are poorly equipped to even understand the problem at this stage – we will only gradually be able to concretize what it means and why it is a problem throughout the investigation. This should not surprise since it is very much a consequence of the denial that there could be such a thing as a definitive and a priori methodology to approach a task of the sort that I have in mind here (these methodological complications have been noted and thematized rigorously in the context of some of the central themes of this investigation by Heidegger [2006], but I will say more about the philosophical sources of the investigation later). Still, the problem is that whatever assertion made in the process will inevitably imply some de facto theory of mind and language (as does the assertion of the problem here!) whose truthfulness is presupposed but not adequately evaluated, and this problem cannot simply be ignored. Therefore, I will, in the following, try to make clear how I intend to maneuver these unresolved theoretical issues.

This begins with noting that the denial of an objective fundament of language does not throw one in a hopeless philosophical limbo where meaning becomes unavailable, because such claims would be self-defeating<sup>2</sup>: To raise questions about the nature of mind, language, and reality, one needs to have some conceptual understanding of *these* terms, e.g., to deny that language can objectively describe reality, I need to have an ontological theory not only of language but also of reality and justifying that claim would require me to make that explicit. One essential practical complication of institutional life is that such discussion is deemed outside the scientific domains we discussed so far, and if a definitive methodological stance were expected at this stage of the investigation, the character of the discussion would be one of choosing intellectual camps (whatever such choice is guided by), something that does not strike me as helpful. Rather than announcing my allegiance to any ontological theory I myself have poorly understood, I would

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<sup>2</sup> The reason is that every assertion has, as long as it is sincere, an appeal to truth. Therefore, the intent inherent to any communicative action, at least partially, is reliant on an attempt to conceptualize phenomena as they present themselves, and I am unsure if an utterance, let alone a theoretical stance would be intelligible if that goal were given up. One simply would have nothing to say.

prefer to respond to the methodological problem by trying to uphold scrutiny in making clear where my account stands, without attempting to classify it myself.

What I thus hope to provide could be described as a *phenomenally grounded* account. What I mean by this is the following: If the phenomenon of reflection serves to express and justify methodological criteria in the first place, if an inquiry into the phenomenon of reflection is supposed to help us understand what ‘thinking intelligently’, or ‘acting ethically’ means, if it is supposed to help us make sense of the foundations of professional practice, then the first step will be to abstract from all theoretical appropriation of the phenomenon and ask, in a positively naïve sense: What do we mean with ‘reflection’ in the first place? What kinds of linguistic expression and experience do we associate with the term, and to what other kinds of linguistic expression and experience do these relate? The formal traditions to ask the questions of how a phenomenon is available in experience and how we use language when talking about it I will rely on when asking these questions are those of phenomenology and analytical philosophy, respectively (since one could object that we cannot describe experience outside of language, the distinction between them is more or less blurry). Now, it is important to emphasize that a phenomenally grounded approach here does not mean the affirmation of an epistemologically or normatively incontestable fundament, it simply implies the development of a descriptive inventory that enables interlocutors to state clearly what they mean and that does not rely on an understanding of some metatheoretical terminology external to the approach; it implies a reduction and leveling of covertly self-referential theoretical constructs. The goal is to express as clearly as possible whatever understanding we already have and make transparent how epistemological and normative ideals may be constructed on that basis. The peculiarity then is that any definitive methodological criteria are established only by the phenomenal investigation (if you will, this makes the investigation methodologically reflexive), but this solely accentuates the character of this investigation as an inquiry into the *foundations* of professional practice.

Nonetheless, these considerations and my admittance not to be in possession of ontological theory to resolve them should make clear that what I have in mind, is not something as a definitive theory of reflection. Neither will I try to develop anything that would resemble a complete

taxonomy of reflection, for on the account I will present that would require a full theory of self-thematizing mental life. Rather, I will focus on those forms of reflection that strike me as most important to the central themes of the investigation, the notion of a reflective life and the foundations of professional practice. The fairest way to classify my intention therefore is to describe it as such: What I hope to provide is a self-critical thought experiment on the phenomenon of reflecting on one's life, as well as some suggestions on what it has to do with professional practice and organizational life.

The specific criteria to evaluate this attempt will be established only by the account that follows, in that what I aim to advance here is a line of thinking that serves the purposes of a critically reflective conversation on life. More on what that could mean later; for now, let us say that the chief commitments this entails is, I believe, to state clearly what one means and what one cares about. The complexity of the underlying phenomena unfortunately tends to work against that, and I will leave the verdict on how well I measured up to these commitments to others, but these are what matters to me in the context of this work.

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Let me briefly specify what philosophical sources I will rely on when approaching the conceptual work. Besides the methodical considerations above, the themes of the investigation guided their selection; most notably, a phenomenon that has, to my awareness, not been properly addressed in the discourse of reflection in the context of professional practice is that of reflecting on one's life. I do believe, however, that this phenomenon is the keystone for an adequate and comprehensive description of the practical dimension of the larger phenomenon of (critical) reflection. Its omission strongly contributes to the sort of ambiguity that invites for metatheoretical excess and ideological pervasion. In turn, I suggest that a proper thematization of this phenomenon could help to ground the debate and open new avenues for conversation and practice. Moreover, the lack of thematization of the phenomenon can be accounted for in parts by the motivational dynamics inherent to the phenomenon itself, which can thus provide a response to the state of its thematization. Its description therefore forms the goal of my conceptual account and it prepares the following normative discussion.

In fact, the phenomenon of reflecting on one's life (including the discussed methodological complications inherent to any adequate discussion of it), has been described by some of the philosophical literature discussed in business and design, most notably by Heidegger (2006) where it serves not only as the central theme of analysis but also, importantly, grounds the methodological approach. At that, Heidegger's discussion of the phenomenon, as that of some of his successors, suffers from terminological mannerisms and a generally thetic conceptual development, rather than a transparent problematization. I contend with Tugendhat (1979) that the latter is indispensable for a controllable discussion of the phenomenon, and will therefore largely follow his critical redescription, though I will develop a conceptual account of reflection that differs from that of Tugendhat.

Specifically, I will speak of reflection as 'thematizing one's own attitudes', and to flesh out this conception, I will rely on authors from both phenomenology and analytical philosophy that address some of the epistemological questions around knowledge of one's own attitudes, both from advocates of models of 'inner representation' (Chalmers, 2003; Gertler, 2012) and critics of such accounts (Bar-On, 2000; Shoemaker, 1988, 1994). In particular, Zahavi (2004) and Dretske (2005) provided important impulses for the specification of the definition I will advance. As we saw, the discussion on reflection within professional practice has mostly focused on the noetic side, though the importance of emotions and actions has been maintained in recent works. To substantiate this development, I will draw from philosophical theories of emotion (Crane, 1998; Goldie, 2002; Ratcliffe, 2005, 2009; Slaby, 2008) to integrate epistemic, affective, and volitional considerations into a comprehensive conception of personal attitudes. To conceptually organize the latter, I will also heavily rely on Frankfurt (1971; 2004a, 2004b, 2004c), and, to a lesser degree on Korsgaard (2009). I do not want to anticipate these developments here, as they form the core of the next chapter, but as a consequence of these, the central divergence from Tugendhat's thinking will be the introduction of a distinction between reflection and deliberation; it is a distinction that I hold to be important when addressing the conceptual problem as well as when formulating an answer to the question why both conceptual and normative problem are not duly discussed, but that does not imply any drastic changes to

Tugendhat's account as far as the larger normative consequences are concerned. My essential thoughts around the idea central to the investigation, the social ideal of a reflective life, and its connection to the normative problem of reflection are thus chiefly indebted to Tugendhat's philosophy.

In summary, I will approach the problems defined in the last chapter by setting the works of different philosophers into a structured relation. I will refer to the result of this as 'my account', not because I want to highlight my personal achievement, but because my interpretation will likely introduce errors that are not inherent to the original material – otherwise, I am happy to concede that most of the essential features of the account I am about to present have their origins in the works of others, most notably in Tugendhat (1979, 2003). Besides continuing to rely on the latter in Chapter 5, and adding some concerns articulated by Rorty (1983) to the picture that will help to concretize the implications of the circularity problem, I will devote a special focus on MacIntyre (2007) in my discussion of the normative problem of reflection in the context of institutional life. The reason is that MacIntyre is already discussed in the discourse on organizational life and professional practice (Beadle, 2002; Beadle & Moore, 2006; Brewer, 1997; Dunne, 2003; MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002; Moore & Grandy, 2017) and the discussion of his work comes closest to the sort of conversation I believe scholars of reflexivity aim at when they accentuate the 'critical' side of reflection (its capacity to articulate criticisms of present social, cultural, and political norms). I will, in that part of the investigation, refrain from the attempt of reorganizing the works of the authors discussed into a consolidated systematic position of my own. Instead, I will try to let their accounts speak for themselves (as well as I can) and limit myself to discussing the consequences.

### **3.2. HOW I METHODICALLY APPROACHED THE INVESTIGATION**

From a methodical perspective, it is important to highlight that the theme of the investigation emerged only during the process, meaning I did not set out to write a text about different conceptions of reflection. The origins of that endeavor lie much rather in a number of vague intuitions explored through autoethnographic (but not methodically rigid) ways – the sort of

noetic, emotional, and volitional attitudes that I deemed important in my efforts to make sense of life. The project thus began with the intention to thematize and realize some of my idiosyncratic versions of ‘improving the status quo’, and, consequently, in an effort to articulate the constituting phenomena. It was due to having engaged in a very open-ended inquiry into the meaning and tenability of the conceptions I had at the time – namely, an effort to make sense of notions such as ‘authentic life’ and ‘meaningful innovation’ – that the theme of living a reflective life emerged which again forced a critical review of how claims of ‘improving the status quo’ would have to be evaluated. I also did not identify the problems I address with this text beforehand. Rather, I developed the conceptual account first, trying to make sense of the phenomena that seemed central for efforts of ‘taking a step back to make sense of one’s life’ and then reviewed the existing scholarly discussion on these phenomena to critically compare it with my account. The reason for this approach is simple: What is problematic can only be decided on the grounds of some positive concerns. I am not sure if any of these developments are generalizable, thus I am unsure to what degree a methodical discussion stands to benefit from their thematization, but I anyways find it important to mention these things here. If anything, they could help in explaining where I went wrong, if I did.

On a more instrumental level, the central methodical challenge was to set various different conceptions into reference and integrate the resulting considerations into a coherent whole. To accomplish this task in a systematic manner, I relied on a number of visual organization tools that culminated in a ‘Wall of Ideas’ (Figure 1 displays a part of the final result).





*Figure 1. 'Wall of Ideas'.*

The key task addressed with this tool was to dissect, structure, and reorganize large bodies of texts, though the complication therein was intensified by the disorientation that comes with the lack of a methodological fundament which is, as noted earlier, very much a part of the experience. The whole work thus centered around establishing a logical and thematic structure in an environment of unstructured (conceptual) data, and so I utilized methodical tools that are perhaps at home rather in the domains of design, albeit usually applied to different types of data. The central function of the 'Wall of Ideas' was to visually map conceptual fragments derived from different texts in a manner that allowed to logically reorganize them for the derivation of the conceptual account I will present in the next chapter. To make this possible, I first broke down all the literature serving as possible inputs for the investigation into notes that cited the central ideas advanced in the text. These notes served as summaries of the respective texts, though the intent behind the 'Wall of Ideas' was to put into reference only the essential ideas pertinent to the theme

of the investigation, so these had to be identified. To guide this selection, I highlighted the notes with glyphs to designate passages to be included ('!') as well as thoughts deemed otherwise important ("\*"), e.g., for the understanding of the text on its own (Figure 2 displays an example from Rorty, 1983). These glyphs were chosen rather arbitrarily (the only consideration here was that a '!' could be changed to a '\*', but not the reverse, so as to curb an inflationary selection) and their sole function was to filter important ideas, but the system could be expanded and refined, e.g. to identify contentual themes on the literature analysis level.

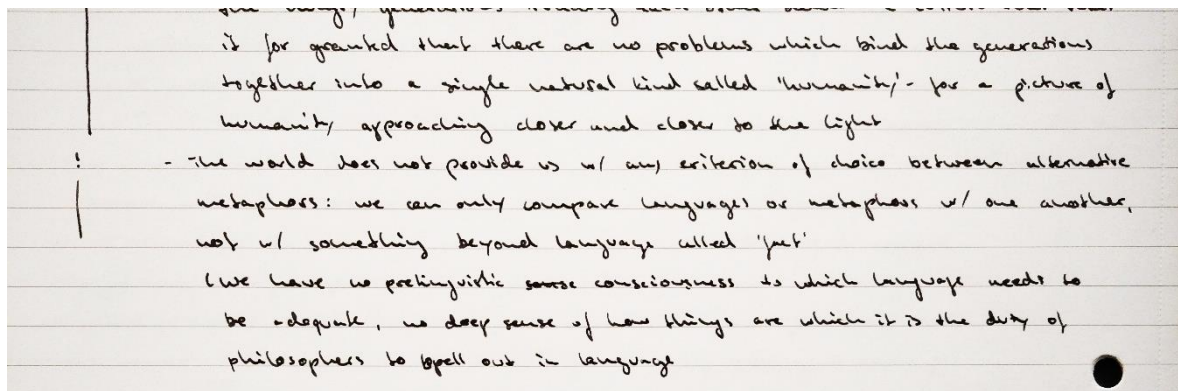
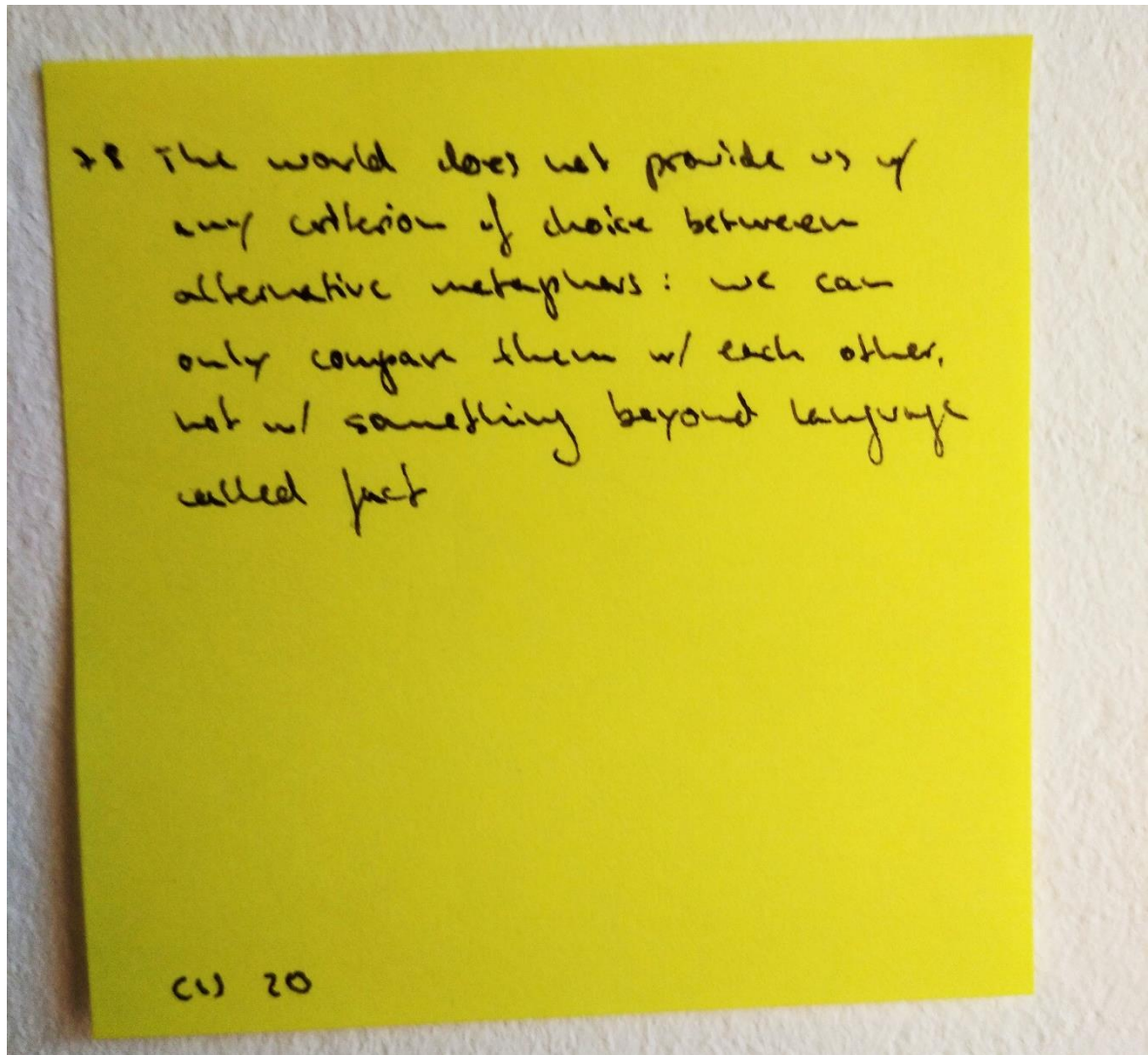


Figure 2. Literature reference entry.

By the end of this process, the highlighted passages were reviewed and a selection of them was mapped with the use of sticky notes (see Figure 3 for the sticky note corresponding to the passage displayed in Figure 2). Besides its sematic content, each sticky note would contain a reference to the original passage (in the case of Figure 2, 'CIS 20' is used as an abbreviation for 'Rorty, 1983:20') and receive a numerical index to make it referenceable itself.



*Figure 3.* Literature reference sticky note. 'The world does not provide us w/ any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors: we can only compare them w/ each other, not w/ something beyond language called fact'.

Through this sequential process, the essential considerations sourced from several thousand pages of literature used as part of the project could be mapped onto around 250 sticky notes, while the individual atoms provided a chain of references back to the original text as well as a summary thereof which could be used to contextualize thoughts and referred to when writing the actual manuscript for this work. Providing the individual citations with numerical indices proved helpful especially when developing the thematic content and logical structure of my own conceptual account. The reason is that this made it possible to reference them from a series of



own considerations, comprising own ideas, unresolved theoretical problems, comments, and research questions or guiding thoughts, which I categorized through a color-scheme – the pertinent sticky notes were again indexed for cross-referencing (see the legend in Figure 4 where I also tracked the index for the respective type).

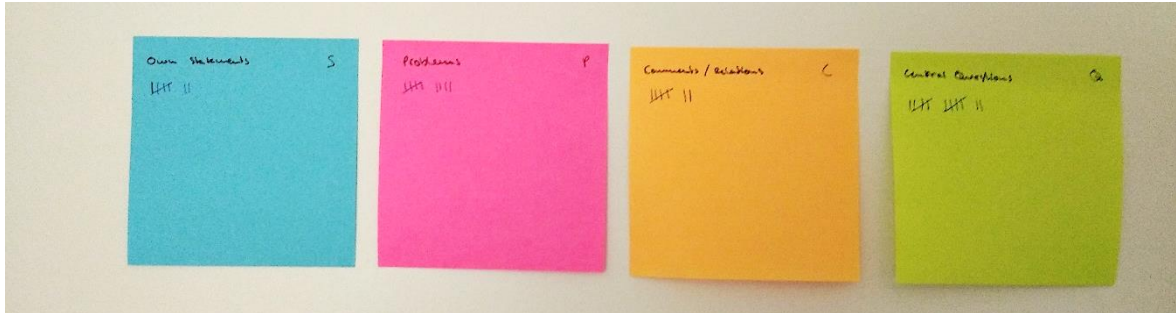


Figure 4. Categorization scheme. ‘Own Statements, Problems, Comments/Relations, Central Questions’.

As a result of this, the ‘Wall of Ideas’ could also be used to organize all central ideas into a narrative order and thus provided a skeleton for the final text (Figure 5 highlights the flow of chapter 4.3.).



Figure 5. Structural Flow.

This system of data organization could of course be expanded and relied on in consequent stages or other types of research, e.g., when setting the conceptual work of this text in reference to empirical findings.

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As a final methodic remark, let me briefly explain why I wrote this text the way I wrote it. The trivial answer on the surface level is of course that I did so under the influence of stylistic idols – in this case, primarily Tugendhat and Frankfurt – but, going a bit deeper, that admiration is founded to a significant degree on the fact that these authors are again transparent about their stylistic ideals, making them available for critical deliberation. The theme thus also introduces some circularity here, and I wish to add with this to a certain type of conversation which I will try to define in detail in the investigation; one where the interlocutors seek to avoid uncritically advancing anonymous claims. In Tugendhat that is very much part of an entire ethos which I cannot discuss here (see his description of ‘intellectual integrity’ in Tugendhat [2003]), but in this particular context, I believe much is done by being honest about something Frankfurt says with Nils Bohr: that ‘one should never *speak* more clearly than one can *think*’ (2004b:170). The conceptual relations in this work are complex, and I am not sure how well the attempt to capture them in systematic language went, but as a general principle, I gave talking about what I think matters priority over making an eloquent point about what does not. These stylistic ideals (ideals, mind you – to what degree I may or may not live up to them is another question!), are not alien to the discussion of reflection and reflexivity in organization science, neither the idea that the rhetorical mode should follow the thematic point, as exemplified by Van Maanen: ‘If a celebrated theorist [Karl Weick] publicly displays a tentative and reversible stance toward the objects of his affection, these objects might not be so objective after all. The style becomes the theory.’ (1995:138). He further writes about Karl Weick’s writing style: ‘The work reads as something of a personal reflection, a meditation of a theme’, and for obvious reasons this resonates well with me when thinking about my approach to this text.

The range of sub-problems I will address in this text is extremely vast. I am aware that this goes against the standards of academic work and it entails that my account will almost certainly fail to

give a conclusive answer to any of these sub-problems. But drawing connections, if tentative ones, between different discourses is very much the methodical intent of this work, and, as Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) maintain, sometimes it might be more fruitful to ‘use problematization as a methodology for challenging the assumptions that underlie not only others’ but also one’s *own* theoretical position’, rather than dogmatically repeating fragments of what others have said more accurately (p.252). I still hope that my criticisms to the existing debate, which come very much from an outsider’s perspective, are not unfair. Arguably, some parts of the definitory development could have been shortened or omitted, if novelty of argument is the criterium, and I hope that this does not make this a boring text. The reason why I hold a more comprehensive account tenable is twofold: Firstly, since, as suggested above, certain metatheoretical presuppositions are an inevitable consequence of whatever vocabulary one chooses to use, I hope to make a critique of these presuppositions as easy as possible by being transparent about the investigation’s terminological fundament. Secondly, the investigation bridges different scholarly discussions that are to a certain degree institutionally separated – therefore, I believe that it is helpful to clarify the basic vocabulary the investigation builds on within the text. More importantly, the broadness of this work is unavoidable because it very much lies in the phenomena to be thematized, and ‘solving’ the problem by chopping it down into easily digestible fragments only leads to losing sight on the complex interconnections at play, upon which conceptual problems become irresolvable. Against common practice, I therefore suggest that the habit of isolating problems into conceptual bites makes academic research to a certain degree blind to the foundations of its own problems. But this is again a suggestion that needs to be qualified by the following account; and with that we are ready to venture into the core of the investigation by raising the question what kind of phenomenon reflection could be.

## 4. WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE A REFLECTIVE LIFE

In this chapter, I will try to make clear what I have in mind when I use the phrase ‘Living a reflective life’. This commits me to address the conceptual problem of reflection and explain what I think the term ‘reflective’ means, both generally and in conjunction with a particular way of living one’s life. I will approach this task in four steps, dividing this chapter into four sections:

In a first step, I will give an account of what it generally means to reflect on something. In contrast to more narrow definitions that describe the activity of reflection as a systematic pursuit of a coherent perspective towards something, I will advocate for a broad definition that I believe describes the phenomenon more accurately: in my view, ‘reflecting on something’ simply means to thematize one’s own attitudes towards it. And while one *can* do that in systematic ways in search of a coherent perspective, it is equally possible to do so in highly convoluted, inchoate, and restrictive ways. As a consequence of this broad definition, I will discern different ways of reflecting on something that can be distinguished by their respective intent, including but not limited to those that aim for coherent attitudes. One major question I want to examine in this investigation is in what way we have to think of reflection as a social practice, and what that implies for the cooperative practices that make up human life. The conceivable positions one could base such a discussion on range from reflection as an inextricably social activity to reflection as an activity that involves some sort of solipsistic retreat from the (social) world. I will discuss this question throughout the entire chapter, but in the first section I will prepare a nuanced and differentiated answer by arguing against the claim that reflection is a strictly individuating activity, while also making plausible that it involves an inherently 1st-personal perspective on one’s own attitudes.

‘To reflect’ is often used synonymously with ‘to deliberate’, in particular when a narrow definition is in play; in contrast, I suggest that these activities, while intimately connected, are not to be equated, and I will therefore devote the second section to discuss the distinctness, yet interrelatedness of both concepts. Both concepts come together when one evaluates the whole context of one’s attitudes towards something with the intent to form a justifiable coherent

perspective; a particular form of reflection which I will define as ‘critical reflection’. With this I will also provide a conceptual alternative to narrow definitions of reflection that makes clear what exactly is so particular about this way of reflecting on something, while still situating it within the larger spectrum of possible ways to reflect. Overall, the methodical goal of these two first sections is to provide a fundamental vocabulary that supplies the rest of the investigation, not only insofar I will define the key concept ‘Living a reflective life’ on its terms, but also insofar I will build on it in the discussion that follows this chapter.

In the third section, I will turn towards forms of self-reflection, with a focus on the case of reflecting on one’s life. Suggesting that to reflect on one’s life means to thematize the total context of one’s attitudes, I will argue that this form of reflection is of high importance to how a person lives and experiences her life, and how she evaluates the prospects of critically reflecting on her behavior. For this, I will elaborate on the interrelation between reflecting on one’s life with different intents and critically reflecting on things in general, and highlight the motivational dynamics encompassing the two. The suggestion that reflection is itself a deliberate activity on whose prospects a person develops varying perspectives based on her life conception raises the question for ways to live one’s life that integrally involve efforts of continuous critical reflection and therefore warrant the name of a reflective life, thus initiating the discussion of the central concept of this investigation.

Finally, I will approach the question of what it means to live a reflective life by first outlining the social dynamics surrounding the different ways to engage in the activity of reflection; that is, I will thematize reflection as a communicative practice. The central considerations here are, firstly, that our communicative efforts to engage in reflection mutually influence each other’s motivations to reflect in particular ways, and, secondly, that social roles and norms define the extent to which a person is entitled and committed to engage in expressive efforts of reflection and deliberation. This discussion culminates in the claim that a reflective life is one that is open to and sustained by a continuous conversation of a person and her social environment on how it is like to live and on how to live, individually and together. The concept of a reflective life can thus be seen as a criterium for life conceptions that can be fulfilled not by the individual alone but within a social



community; that is, as a social ideal. The development of this concept will conclude this chapter and prepare the next, where I will discuss this concept in the context of institutional life.

#### 4.1. REFLECTING ON SOMETHING

What do we mean when we say we reflect on something? When we tell someone that we need to reflect on something we might do so by saying something like ‘I need to take a step back and make up my mind’. We then think of reflection as an activity that ‘discloses, disentangles, explicates, and articulates’ (Zahavi, 2005:88) some kind of previously ‘unreflected’ experience. But what kind of activity is that exactly and why do we call it ‘reflection’?

As we saw earlier, we call something ‘reflexive’ when it stands in some relation to itself (Tugendhat, 1979:155). In some cases, such as that of physical properties, this seems rather straightforward – when I look into the mirror, I see my reflection, that means I see myself (and in extension we call, perhaps a bit confusingly, a surface such as the mirror ‘reflexive’, not because it stands in some relation to itself, but because it enables a reflexive relation of another object; in this case: it allows an object that emits waves of light to perceive them) – but when talking about an activity, things seem less clear. Perhaps we want to say, in analogy to seeing one’s reflection in the mirror, that to reflect means to stand or engage in some relation to oneself, but it is not immediately clear what that means and then the phrase ‘reflecting on myself’ would be tautological which it does not seem to be if other phrases we use such as ‘reflecting on the past year’ or ‘reflecting on my relationship’ are to make any sense.

What I reflect on thus does not necessarily need to be myself, but I always reflect *on something*. To reflect is something we can do because we can have attitudes (emotions, beliefs, intentions, etc.) *towards* something<sup>3</sup>. Reflection seems to involve becoming familiar with my attitudes in a particular way which perhaps becomes clearer if we compare reflection to immersion: in a sense,

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<sup>3</sup> The technical term here would be ‘intentional attitudes’. I will also refer to them by speaking of attitudes that are ‘about something’, which to be precise has a narrower meaning in that for some intentional attitudes the question ‘What is the attitude about?’ has no obvious answer (Crane, 1998:3), though I will use it synonymously in the loose sense of ‘towards something’.

becoming immersed in my attitudes towards something amounts to the opposite of what I have in mind when I want to reflect on it – for instance, I can be ‘blind with rage’ toward something – and there seems to be nothing reflexive about that. When we reflect, we often aim for ‘oversight’ (Frankfurt, 2004b:170) as opposed to immersion. If being immersed – paying exclusive attention to something – seems to be the opposite of reflecting on something, then why not understand reflection as a special modification of our attention (Zahavi, 2005:88), a broad form of attention rather than the narrow one of immersion, one where rather than focusing on one attitude exclusively we focus on several attitudes at the same time?

Indeed, a modification of our attention seems to coincide with reflection: When I reflect, I typically contextualize the attitude in focus, for instance: when I am angry at someone, I can make myself simultaneously aware of a benevolent attitude I have towards that person. But through attention alone we cannot explain reflection, firstly because for reflection it matters what the attitudes I focus my attention on are about (suppose I was angry at someone and made myself aware that I plan to bake a pie the next day – not very reflective), and because other than shifting my attention towards one or several things, reflecting on something is an activity (Zahavi, 2005:90), in which I can be immersed (a person can be ‘stuck’ while ‘stepping back’) or from which I can be distracted. Like other activities, reflection requires sustained attention so that I can reflect on something in more focused or unfocused ways, but reflection is not identical to attention (it makes no sense to say that I am unfocused while focusing on something).

When I reflect, I am not ‘mindlessly absorbed’ in whatever attitudes I have (be it one or several at the same time), that is to say: I am not simply aware *of* whatever attitudes I have, instead I am or become aware *that* I have them (Dretske, 2005:60; Goldie, 2002:242). This entails that whenever I reflect, I am aware of it (though I of course do not need to have or form any attitude on my reflective activity, I do not need to be aware *that* I am reflecting on something). What therefore seems essential for reflection, for ‘taking a step back’, is that I can have attitudes – thoughts, feelings, desires, etc. – that are about my attitudes, and that seems to be a better candidate for a reflexive phenomenon (Frankfurt, 2004a:17): To stay with the example, I could, upon reflection, be sad that I am angry, in other cases I could be proud that I have a particular thought, I could

desire to have a certain feeling, or think about what to do with that desire, and so on. Reflection, thus understood, denotes a process of making myself aware *that* I have certain attitudes towards something<sup>4</sup>, by becoming aware *of* attitudes that I have or form about these attitudes. These considerations are probably best taken into account by saying that to reflect on something means to *thematize my attitudes towards something* (see Zahavi, 2005:54).

Whenever I do this I may form new or different attitudes towards the attitudes I thematize, but I might also end up with different attitudes towards whatever I reflect on; for example, whereas the point of departure when reflecting on a person might be to thematize my wrathful feeling towards that person, the *outcome* of the reflection might not only be a sad feeling about my wrath but also a forgiving intention towards that person instead (though I could of course end up with the same attitude as before, I might even intensify my wrath, or both might be true and I could now have a forgiving intention despite being more wrathful). One might go one step further in attributing a transformative character to reflection: If reflection relies on sustained attention on whatever its theme, then it is necessary that we retain an awareness of whatever attitudes we thematize (reflection requires a temporally continuous awareness [Zahavi, 2005:55]). One could now question if the process of retaining and thus making myself thematically aware of the attitudes I have previously been non-thematically aware of, somehow alters their original experiential character, and, based on that: does reflection provide us with an authentic access to our attitudes or does it run a risk of misleading us about them (Zahavi, 2005:73)? At first that may seem like a somewhat absurd suggestion, but, considering our example, compare a situation in which, on the

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of reflection I advance here is restricted to the thematization of a person's own intentional attitudes. Depending on one's view on the latter, one could perhaps object that we can also thematize non-intentional attitudes, perhaps a certain mere phenomenal impression (perceiving a color, etc.), but it seems to me that with respect to the activity of 'taking a step back to reflect', we are typically concerned with what attitudes we have about something and, consequentially, what they should be (we can only 'make up our mind' with respect to something). This should become clearer when I address the aspects of reflection that pertain to self-insight and deliberation below. Hence, my suggestion to circumvent an exhaustive discussion of this question would be that by restricting the definition to the thematization of intentional attitudes, we come closest to what we mean when we speak of 'reflecting'; this will be the topic of this investigation in any case. The range of possible intentional objects of my attitudes is of course not restricted to physical objects, but can include events, propositions, my own or someone else's attitudes, and so on. I can reflect on such things as 'whatever it is that's on my mind right now', 'the first age of Middle-earth', or 'the fleeting character of summer nights', as long as I can plausibly form attitudes towards them, and often we do reflect on such weird things, if I say so myself.

spur of the moment, I proclaim that I am angry at someone with one in which I do so after a long pause of reflective silence. Intuitively, we would want to think of my claim as being more credible in the first ('immersed') instance than in the second ('reflective') instance. What factors are at work here?

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Let us disregard the obvious possibility that I could have lied and assume that my utterance was sincere. If my utterance is nonetheless less credible in the reflective instance, it must be possible then that I somehow got it wrong: I sincerely say that I am angry at someone, but really, I am not. I am really aware *of* an attitude but my awareness *that* I have such and such an attitude is flawed. I reflected – that is I thematized my attitudes by forming an attitude about them, namely the belief that I am angry at someone (if not explicitly then implicitly by sincerely having some attitude that relies on this belief), but that belief is wrong. The utterance 'I am mad at you!' ascribes an attitude (anger) about something (you) to someone (me). My belief therefore fails to be true if it involves a misunderstanding with respect to any of these constituents (see Bar-On, 2000:10).

Perhaps, then, I have misidentified one of them? To see how this could be possible, let us briefly clarify what it means to identify something, taking visual perception as an example. When I identify something in perception, I am aware *that* something is such and such because I am aware *of* it (Shoemaker, 1994:252), meaning I am aware of a certain proposition, e.g., 'Henry destroyed my car', because I am aware of the objects that constitute it ('Henry' and 'my car'). For that to be possible I need to distinguish something I perceive from *all other things* for which I rely on intrinsic information (properties such as color, shape, etc.), but building on these I can also identify things by their relation to other things (Shoemaker, 1994:253): in the example, I could describe 'my car' as 'the car currently being destroyed by Henry' or as 'the red car'. Therefore, I can identify things and propositions in my environment by means of describing their (contextually unique) properties or by demonstratively referencing them (e.g., pointing my index finger at them, thus establishing a relation to my position), and by tracking them over time (Shoemaker, 1994:253); I thus single them out in a 'universe of things' in the underlying dimension of space and time (Tugendhat, 1979:175). If I want to be sure not to misidentify

something, this requires me to pay continuous attention<sup>5</sup> while standing in an adequate spatiotemporal relation to whatever I want to identify, thus attesting to its spatiotemporal continuity: ‘I know that *this* person *here* destroyed my car and not *that* person over *there*, because I have been following him until *now*’ (see Tugendhat, 1979:72,79). So much for identifying something in perception. But how does any of this apply to the attitudes I am aware of, namely to the self-ascription of an attitude about something?

Let us first consider the last of the constituents mentioned above, which is also the strangest: Could I have misidentified myself? Could it be that ‘I was not being myself’ when I yelled at you, as we sometimes say? Could it be that someone was angry at you, but I falsely came to believe it was me? That sounds absurd, but consider the following scenario: I could find a diary whose contents lead me to belief that I was very sad in my childhood, only to find out that it was written by someone else (see Bar-On, 2000:5). I thus falsely attributed an attitude to myself as a consequence of confusing myself for another. The answer with respect to our anger-example is still, straightforwardly, no. As soon as I am aware of an attitude, we want to say, I know it is mine – though one needs to be careful with the terminology here: It is of course possible for me to be aware of an attitude and not be (thematically) aware that I have it, so if the latter is required for knowing that I have an attitude, we have to revise the above (see Dretske, 2005:60). Moreover, I can of course be aware of attitudes that others have, but not directly so – what I am aware of is their behavior and its effects and that expresses whatever attitudes they have. In just the same way I can be aware of my own attitudes as expressed through my behavior and its effects, but then my awareness of them is *mediate* as that of any other observer would be. We can therefore say that in such cases I am aware of my attitudes from ‘3rd-person perspective’ (see Tugendhat, 1979:33),

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<sup>5</sup> That rings close to what I said about reflection earlier: to reflect on something, I need to somehow keep paying attention to whatever attitudes I have towards it, although the analogy falls short with respect to the special spatiotemporal relation I need to have with respect to the object of my perception. Irrespective, the analogy seems altogether misplaced: To reflect successfully, I of course have to pay attention to it in the same way as I need to pay attention to a lot of other activities, but if I am angry at you, I do not need to continuously pay attention to whatever my attitude is about to see if you are really the person I am angry at (see below). And our claim went into the opposite direction: we suggested that by attentively thematizing an attitude I am aware of I become falsely aware that I have such and such an attitude.

and from that perspective I can indeed demonstratively refer to myself as a thing in a spatiotemporal dimension (*qua* my body), but also misidentify myself as the bearer of a certain attribute, which explains the diary-scenario. However, it is particular about my attitudes that I usually do not need to do that, that is to say I (and only I) have an *immediate* awareness of my own attitudes<sup>6</sup>, I am aware of them from ‘1st-person perspective’ (see Tugendhat, 1979:33)<sup>7</sup>. In fact, that this is so is elemental for me being able to know anything about myself at all, because to identify myself with respect to some perception, I need to have a criterium which cannot itself rely on identification, lest I fall into some infinite regress (Shoemaker, 1994:258). Moreover, to identify anything at all, I need to be able to refer it to myself as the ultimate point of reference: what allows me to attest to the spatiotemporal continuity of something is the relation it has or does not have to the ‘here and now’-center of my perspective (Tugendhat, 1979:77). It is unclear how any of this would work if I had to ask for every observation if it is really mine or someone else’s. By competently using the concept ‘I’ in the ascription of an occurrent attitude I make it sufficiently clear that it is me who is having the attitude in the sense of being immediately aware of it. Asking who the subject of my attitudes is turns things upside down, since the possibility of and necessity for reference to and description of any attitudes only arises with individuated awareness, whereby others have no immediate awareness of my attitudes.

It is also not clear how any misidentification of the attitude’s bearer would alter the attitude’s experiential character, for that seems to hinge rather on ‘what it is like’ to be immediately aware

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<sup>6</sup> This does not make my attitudes private or ‘internal’ objects – it is the same attitude that is manifest in feeling and expression (not considering the further complication that I have some level of control over my bodily states and behavior which I can use to lie and pretend). But the epistemic procedure is different in that the observation of behavior is vulnerable to the sort of identification errors that having a feeling is not, that is to say in the latter case no epistemic procedure is required (Bar-On, 2000:11); we do not need to deliberate on what they are (see below).

<sup>7</sup> It is nigh impossible to settle on a terminology to describe the special relation I have to myself (epistemic and otherwise). Terms such as subject, subjectivity, self-awareness, self-consciousness, first-person perspective, self-consciousness, ego, etc. all come with a set of associations and implications; in the worst case with such that they obscure the very phenomenon to explain, e.g., when one starts to talk about the awareness of ‘a self’ or ‘the ego’ that is treated like an object of perception (see Shoemaker, 1994; Tugendhat, 1979). Since I have no interest of addressing this larger phenomenon in its own right and want to refrain from any terminology that provokes obstructive associations, I will abide by the concepts of ‘immediate’ and ‘mediate’ awareness, though I may at times use those of 1st- and 3rd-person perspective as well.

of the attitude, and that seems to depend on what kind of attitude it is (it is different to be mad about a person than to be infatuated with a person, though they are said to coincide) and on what the attitude is about (it is a different experience to be mad about what a person did to me than to be mad about an election; Zahavi, 2005:117).

Let us start with the latter. Misidentifying what my attitude is about can, in our example, be understood as follows: I am angry about something, but it is not what I believe to be angry about. That sounds less absurd! My attitudes are attitudes towards something, that something being a thing in the world, or perhaps some state of things; and these are what we (mis-)identify in visual perception. To corroborate this intuition: my suggestion that I do not have to identify myself relied on the notion of an immediate awareness – this notion hardly applies in this case. Because it would be absurd to suggest that whenever I am angry at you, I am immediately aware of you – after all, you do not even have to be present. That means I do not have to identify you in perception while I am angry about you (I do not have to follow you around to attest to your spatiotemporal continuity to sustain my anger towards you). But I must somehow be acquainted with you to have any attitudes towards you – acquainted, we may add, in a way that explains why I am mad at you: While I may say that I am angry at some *thing*, I am typically angry about some state of things. For instance, rather than being angry about you, I am angry that you destroyed my car. That is to say I have an attitude towards a certain proposition (Tugendhat 1979:20-21). But with respect to our problem that does not change much: In accordance with what I said above, to form attitudes towards a proposition, I must have had some thematic awareness of it, or rely on someone else's articulation of it, and both require an awareness of the objects that constitute the proposition (be it in imagination if they are fictions). Forming reflective attitudes about things requires me to acquire concepts of these things (a world of things to be mad about) which in turn requires me generally to stand in some perceptual relation to these things and to the behavior of the members of a linguistic community (Shoemaker, 1994:259). In this context I can, trivially, run into errors of misidentification when acquiring and applying concepts, which will cause me to use terms that others would not hold applicable, e.g. because I do not understand the conditions that warrant the application of the term or because something (e.g. my perception or

what someone told me) falsely leads me to think the conditions are given when they are not. I can thus be wrong about what my concepts refer to in virtually every particular instance, though not generally because what my thoughts and words mean depends on what I habitually apply them to (Davidson, 1987:541) and the extent to which these conventions are interpretable by interlocutors (Davidson, 1987:536), whereby a complete lack of interpretability would render me incapable of communicating and thus of acquiring any concepts at all. In the case of ‘I am angry at *you*’ the conventions are special: whoever I address with this statement is meant, and if I want to make sure the person understands that she is really meant (or that I understand the term) I have to support that in behavior by ‘giving her my attention’ (i.e. demonstratively referencing her by looking at her, and so on), which I can of course do unsuccessfully. But that’s beside the point because I am addressing you, thus using the term, because I am angry at you, not the other way round. Rather, I am angry at you as the constituent of a certain proposition (e.g. as ‘the destroyer of my car’). And in that, I can go wrong in various ways: I can be mad at a person for having done something when in fact she has never done it, I can be mad at you because I am mad at ‘Henry’ and I falsely belief you are him, inversely I can belief that I am mad at ‘Henry’ when in fact the person I am mad it is not called so or does not even exist (as a spatiotemporal thing; I could have an imaginary nemesis), and so on. My attitude then rests on a false belief. But nothing in my thematic awareness of a certain attitude seems to require that the beliefs entailed or implied by this attitude are correct; when thematizing my attitude I will simply ascribe to myself whatever concepts I have *qua* my false belief, since I trivially cannot ascribe to myself concepts that I do not have (Bar-On, 2000:13). To do so, I do not need to examine my attitude for what could be meant by it because I am immediately aware of what I mean, and thus what my attitude is about. In other words: I do not have to identify what I mean, if I mean anything at all; it would be absurd to say ‘I am mad at *someone*, but is it *you*?’ (Bar-On, 2000:10). To be sure, what I mean can fail to be what I think it is, and I can thus fail to refer to things when articulating my attitude<sup>8</sup>. I then fail to

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<sup>8</sup> It probably makes sense to distinguish between ostensible reference (to whatever is meant by my attitude) and actual reference (to whatever is denoted by the articulation of my attitude, including the possibility that this is nothing) in these cases (Shoemaker, 1994:267).



articulate my anger or am unjustified in being angry about whatever I am angry about, but that is not what we are concerned about, because I could continue to angry about it, ‘for no reasons’, even after my false belief was exposed to me.

But sometimes I am *unaware* of what I am angry about! Some attitudes are such that I do not seem to mean anything when I have them, they are not about anything in a strict sense. I can have attitudes towards unidentified things (they can thus call for identification): For instance, I can be alerted to the presence of something ostensibly dangerous by my fear (Goldie, 2002:234). The prime example of this phenomenon would be moods: Whereas other attitudes, such as beliefs, are either unaware or thematically aware, including what they are about (*qua* their articulation in thought; I cannot be non-thematically aware of a thought, hence why self-ascribed thoughts are self-verifying [Bar-On, 2000:12]), moods are ways of being non-thematically aware of complex, unidentified propositions (insofar as one believes that they are, in fact, attitudes towards something, but I will address this question later). Simply put, I do not need to be thematically aware that something is so and so for it to put me in a bad mood; e.g., I can firstly become thematically aware that I am infatuated with a person when I notice, in hindsight, that it was her behavior (her absence, disregard, etc.) which has put me in a bad mood. I will return to this phenomenon over the course of the investigation. For the moment, we can, concerning the question about a possible misidentification of what my attitudes are about, recapitulate: Once I am aware that I am angry at *someone*, I am safe from confusing them.

That leaves as the last option the possibility that I could go wrong in identifying what kind of attitude I am aware of. Here, I am perhaps most intimately confronted with ‘what it is like’ to have a certain attitude – I can feel the anger affecting me. And just as I need to know what it is like to perceive the color red to identify a red car in perception, I need to know what it is like to be angry to identify my feelings of anger. This seems similar to visual perception: how could I possibly identify something ‘red’ if I did not know what it is like to look at something red (see Chalmers, 2003:6)? If these things rely on the same, or at least a similar mechanism, why would they not produce the same kind of errors: I can be wrong about a car being red once I change my

spatiotemporal relation to it and see it in better light, so why could I not be wrong about being angry once I ‘change my perspective on it’ by thematizing it to ‘see my feelings in a new light’?

There are some limitations to the analogy: I can fail in my attempt to refer to a red thing when talking to you (perhaps it is not really red or you are color-blind) and yet succeed in identifying it by its intrinsic properties, because there are no physical objects that have no properties other than their color; I could thus explain to you what I mean by ‘red’ by pointing out other intrinsic properties of red objects. But my anger does not have any additional intrinsic properties besides how it feels like to be angry. It is therefore impossible for me to identify it by referencing alternative intrinsic properties, and therefore impossible to misidentify in such way: there is nothing that would warrant the premise that I retained my awareness of an attitude if its intrinsic property changed – I would simply be aware of a different attitude then. We could of course say that as I thematized my attitude it vanished and another occurred, and in some cases of reflection that may indeed happen, as suggested above. But the view that I strictly change an attitude’s kind whenever I thematize it seems to defeat itself because to support it I would need to be aware that I first had this attitude and then another, so we can disregard that possibility.

This objection probably makes things a little too easy: One could say that, while I cannot demonstratively refer to my attitude as a thing in a spatiotemporal dimension, arguably, I can demonstratively refer to it by focusing my attention on ‘this quality which I am aware of now’ (see Gertler, 2012:9). I can even direct my attention to bodily feelings that are associated with the emotion, I can feel my chest tightening, and so on. I do not have these perceptions coincidentally, they *are* part of my anger (Slaby, 2008:435). And if you had the right means (if you could measure my heart rate, breathing pattern, etc.), you would be aware of my anger, too. Then again, our immediate awareness of emotions is not accurately described by adding up perceptions we are thematically or non-thematically aware of; rather, when we are angry about something, it is ‘disclosed through diffuse, holistic bodily feelings’ (Slaby, 2008:437), but I do not want to argue about that. The important point is this: While emotions are not to be seen as something apart from their concurrent bodily feelings and their corresponding physiological states – emotions are embodied phenomena, and it is the same phenomenon that we come to be aware of in immediate

and mediate ways –, to become (thematically) aware that I feel a certain emotion I do not have to rely on a conjecture based on any thematic awareness of these processes (be I immediately aware of them or in a mediate way through some perception of my physiological states) as I would if it was not me who has the emotion. I do not need physiological or sensory evidence to know that I feel a certain emotion; rather, my thematic awareness of the emotion forms the criterium for the classification of which physiological and sensory phenomena pertain to what kind of emotion (see Goldie, 2002:238). Thus, while I would probably have to concede that it is theoretically conceivable that I could have used my reflective silence to focus on my bodily sensations and compare them to some memorized information that anger manifests in such and such sensations to erroneously conclude that I must be angry (it is possible to go wrong in attributing occurrent bodily feelings to a certain emotion [Goldie, 2002:237]), let us disregard this rather farfetched scenario.

How can I say at all then, what kind of attitude I am currently aware of? Well, I am immediately aware of it. But how do I know that I feel *like* I am ‘angry’, how do I know how to use the term? If what I suggested above, identifying it by describing my occurrent perceptions is not an option; instead, as also stated above, there must be some expression of the attitude in my behavior for you to be aware of it. In other words, if my exclamation ‘I am angry at you!’ is supposed to have any effect on you, there must be observable criteria with respect to my behavior, in particular our linguistic behavior, that are available for perception and that we (as a linguistic community) can adhere to when using the term ‘angry’ (Tugendhat, 1979:112; Goldie, 2002:240) – in the case of anger: yelling; adopting a combative body stance; a refusal to cooperate with, praise, or trust you; instead an eagerness to hurt, accuse, or insult you; and so on. And the observability of such criteria when uttering a statement does explain why my ‘immersed’ statement might be more credible than the ‘reflective’! Even if I had not reported my immediate awareness of it, you could have relied on your mediate awareness that I am angry. It is even possible that your mediate awareness of my anger is the only awareness of it there is, for I could be angry at you and be *unaware* that I am – I may have an attitude and not know that I do (Tugendhat, 1979:141). It must be then that my attitude was expressed by my behavior in a causal sense (Bar-On, 2000:17), and to become

aware that I have it, I must rely, just as you, on my mediate awareness of it. In any case, while my competence of using the term 'anger' may be reliant on identifying observable behavioral criteria, once I have that competence, I do not need to rely on this procedure when self-ascribing an attitude I am immediately aware of, which means I do not run the risk of confusing it for another one, so it seems that we can rule the possibility of me misidentifying what kind of attitude I am aware of when thematizing it as well.

I hope this walk through an admittedly rather strange thought experiment did not make you angry. I could have taken a shortcut by saying that I am immune to running into errors of misidentification when ascribing to myself attitudes that I am immediately aware of (Bar-On, 2000:7). This should not come surprising: Our attitudes are not things in space and time that we can point at to describe their intrinsic and relational properties. Rather, they constitute our relations to other things, so that, associating attitudinal terms as we become immediately aware of our own attitudes, they themselves can be used to identify things (Tugendhat 1979:113). As such (and perhaps in contrast to what our conceptual dissection suggests), they are unified phenomena that disclose some state of things in the world in particular ways: when I am angry about you, it is not that, on the hand, I am angry, and, on the other, directed at you (Slaby, 2008:438).

None of this means, of course, that it is impossible for me to have (blatantly) incorrect beliefs about my own attitudes: I can falsely rely on mediate awareness or on what others say, even, weirdly, against the evidence of immediate awareness; I can fail to express my attitudes by associating the wrong terms or not understanding how they are used; I can simply be unaware of whatever attitudes I have; and so on. Concerning our example, however, it does imply that as long as I am able to retain an immediate awareness of a certain attitude, I am secure from the problems I can run into when identifying something I see in my environment. It is therefore impossible that what went wrong is the following: rather than being angry at you I was aware of another attitude, but in becoming thematically aware of this attitude I wrongly came to believe that it was being angry at you.

That is perhaps a rather lame conclusion to a strange thought experiment. The detour will still prove helpful, I hope, as we came across a number of considerations that can, in fact, explain how I could have gone wrong!

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Let me suggest one possible scenario to make sense of the example: I have been in a bad *mood* all day, though I could not safely attribute my feelings to anything in particular. When talking to you, you took notice of some unusual communicative behavior and asked ‘What’s wrong?’. This led me to consider how I just behaved in conversation with you, and I took this observation to be a *mediate* awareness of anger towards you that I had been *unaware* of. I thus expressed the resulting belief by stating: ‘I’m angry at you’ (the reason for my bad mood must be that I am angry about you, but I did not let my attitude rise to awareness, which caused my disposition to manifest in the form of my bad mood). The consequent confrontation with you revealed that, really, I was not angry about you, but about something else. The reason for my false, but sincere initial belief was not a matter of becoming thematically aware of my attitudes, but rather a matter of failing to successfully *deliberate on my attitudes*.

Besides the concept of deliberation, we have encountered all ingredients to this interpretation during our thought experiment. Before I come to properly discuss this last conceptual piece, let us compare the ‘immersed’ instance to this version of a ‘reflective’ instance. What is different in the immersed instance is that I was immediately aware of my attitude – and this I must be whenever I am immersed in it – and expressed it in an unreflective manner, perhaps even without deliberating on whether I want to express it or not; I was following an impulse. Addressing the example of anger, the embodiment of emotional attitudes entails not only that we are affected by them *qua* holistic bodily feelings; they also motivate us to express ourselves in certain ways – they can ‘move’ us to act in complex (and deliberate) ways, but in the simplest of cases they are manifest in such ‘mindless’ bodily expressions as widening my eyes or speaking with a shaky voice (see Slaby, 2008:439). Our linguistic expressions of these impulses can extend to declarative sentences such as ‘I am angry at you!’ that are proper semantic statements (Bar-On, 2000:17) and can thus be evaluated with the same criteria as (and are in that regard indistinguishable from) deliberate and

reflective articulations of our thoughts – in other words: ‘when I issue an avowal, I am telling you things *about* my mind by simply *speaking my mind*’ (Bar-On, 2000:23). What makes my declaration credible, then, is that you take your mediate awareness of the full (coherent) range of behavioral expressions as evidence for my anger, and my immediate awareness of it. While my reflective silence warrants no prejudice on whether I am immediately aware of the attitude I ascribe to myself or not (my conclusion to the story is just one possible interpretation, others are conceivable that entail me being immediately aware of my anger), it lacks the accompanying evidence that allows for your mediate awareness, and perhaps one is tempted to say that my feelings of anger *abate* as I thematize them, which is certainly conceivable. But I could just simply suppress my expressions while I am affected by them in just the same intensity (I could be so caught up in thematizing my rage that I am unable to express it properly). Then again, suppressing an attitude’s natural expression might contribute to lessening its intensity, but I do not want to entertain a discussion on the extent to which we control these things and what effects that might have on one being affected by one’s attitudes. The important point with respect to the transformative nature of reflection is that, rather than running into issues we typically struggle with when making sense of things we are mediate aware of, thematizing the attitudes I am immediately aware of can modify the intensity with which they affect me, but that works just as well in the other direction: Sometimes, we *moderate* an attitude as we thematize it, at other times we *indulge* in it. This also provides us with a motive for reflection: We can deliberately reflect on an attitude to both ends. I started by saying that reflection is an activity that ‘discloses’ and ‘explicates’ my attitudes; an activity that empowers us to self-insight. In the light of the discussion up to now, however, reflection rather seems like an activity that *regulates* our attitudes (if deliberately so, or not).

I will defend my original suggestion in the next section; for now, let me recapitulate what my interpretation of the anger-example tells us about the phenomenon of reflection. I began the investigation with the phrase ‘taking a step back to make up my mind’; a phrase we may use when we announce that we intent to reflect on something. A positive sense could be given to the metaphor of ‘taking a step back’ by pointing to the possibility of reflectively moderating attitudes

I was previously immersed in, rather than expressing them impulsively. A common association with this metaphor is the notion of a retreat from the world, and I will come to deepen the paraphrase of this metaphor in this respect. For now, it turns out that we thoroughly misunderstand the phenomenon of reflection – the activity of thematizing our own attitudes – if we understand it as something where we step back from the world to engage in some solipsistic relation with ourselves. If there is something ‘reflexive’ about reflection, it is that when I engage in this activity, I am concerned with my own attitudes, but already in the immediate awareness of my own attitudes I fundamentally relate in causal, affective, linguistic, and conceptual senses to a world of things (including my own embodied presence in it) that is accessible as an intersubjective spatiotemporal dimension (Tugendhat 1979:198; Zahavi, 2005:167). As soon as I engage in an attempt to ‘make sense’ of my own attitudes I usually have to take the mediate awareness of my attitudes into account that manifests in the immediate awareness of the world of things wherein my behavior and that of others manifest. Reflecting on something can involve, and typically does involve, a *mediation between the immediate and mediate awareness* of my attitudes towards something. Whenever I do so, I can be guided by different intentions, including the regulation of my attitudes and the particular mode of reflective deliberation that I engage in when striving for coherence in my attitudes; a mode of reflection that gives positive meaning to the phrase ‘making up my mind’, which I will discuss in the next section by giving an account of the distinctness yet interrelatedness of reflection and deliberation, both of which we allude to when using this phrase.

## 4.2. REFLECTING CRITICALLY

My interpretation to the anger-story left both the initial suggestion that reflection is an activity that we engage in when trying to gain self-insight and a phenomenon crucial to its understanding – deliberation – unexplained. Let me defend my original suggestion and address the phenomenon of deliberation by continuing the (rather generic) story. Suppose that, being unreflectively immersed in my anger (as in the first instance), I express my anger to you and you give the following response to my exclamation: ‘Yeah, you might be angry now. But you are not *really*.’

You thus request that I reflect on my relationship to you, that I thematize my attitudes towards you!

More specifically, you ask me to ‘make up my mind’ – you request that I ask myself what attitudes I have (at all) towards you (your response implies that there should be others) and which of these I *identify with* (Frankfurt, 2004b:172) and that means which of these I *affirm* and which I *reject* (Tugendhat, 1979:30-31).<sup>9</sup> This can, and usually does, entail to engage in an activity to inquire into whether it would be better to affirm certain attitudes (and reject others) or not, and why: deliberation – whenever I deliberate on my attitudes, I seek to identify with them for reasons (Tugendhat, 2003:32-33). Concerning our story, your expectations, and my options to reflect, can be manifold and they may or may not entail the necessity to engage in such activity: Perhaps what you expect is that I merely engage in the above-mentioned kind of intent-driven reflection to moderate my emotion. To comply with this, I could contextualize my current wrathful attitude with benevolent emotions, intentions, memories, and so on, hoping to smother my anger. I would then become thematically aware of my anger and, so goes your expectation, remind myself that it does not represent my ‘true feelings’ towards you. I then do not really have to ask myself what my attitudes to you are supposed to be (I do not need to deliberate), because I know – I have already made up my mind, I merely need to recall it, with the intention to break my emotional immersion; to ‘become myself again’ in the sense that I regain the ability to determine my behavior by what attitudes I identify with.

But the situation might be more severe: You may have misjudged my stance on our relationship or how grave I hold whatever you did to make me angry. Or perhaps we do not really know each other that well. In these instances, I have to properly make up my mind about you, meaning I either have to question if I continue to identify with whatever attitudes I used to identify with, or I have to first ask the question what attitudes I have at all towards you and which of them I think I *should* have and which not. If making up my mind on something entails these two questions,

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<sup>9</sup> Moving forward, whenever I speak of identification I will do so in the sense of affirmative identification, unless stated otherwise. To be sure, I can identify with attitudes by rejecting them since it is also possible that I simply do not identify with an attitude by neither affirming or rejecting it; I could simply notice that I have it.



doing so successfully – answering them – involves the *evocation* of and *deliberation* on my attitudes towards something. Perhaps we want to associate asking the question what attitudes I have at all towards you with evocation and the question which of them I should have with deliberation, but matters are more complex, firstly, because, as we saw, I am sometimes unaware of what attitudes I have, and I therefore need to deliberate on what they might be (i.e., what beliefs I should have about them) by relying on their mediate awareness as encountered in my behavior and its effects, and, secondly, when deliberating on what my attitudes should be I need to rely on criteria that, as we will see, are typically given by what other attitudes I identify with, and I have to be aware of those for them to inform my deliberation. What is crucial for making up my mind successfully then, is to engage, at least partially, in a *disinterested* form of reflection that merely pays thematic attention to whatever attitudes I happen to be aware of (see Goldie, 2002:242; Zahavi, 2005:88). If whatever beliefs and intentions I come to form about my own attitudes were strictly informed by whatever interest moves me to thematize my attitudes, I would be unable to properly thematize the full context of my attitudes (I would live in some form of self-deceptive fiction), and to take them into account when deliberating on what attitudes I should consequently identify with. On the contrary, it is of course possible, though perhaps rare, that the disinterested thematic awareness of my attitudes becomes the sole motivation for reflection. Insofar as I am then merely articulating what kinds of attitudes I have towards what kinds of things, and these two aspects defined, as per the above, an attitude's experiential character, I am then committed to giving a descriptive account of what it is like for me to experience something.

Drawing on these remarks, I have to specify my defense of our reflective potential to gain self-insight: There are forms of reflection that 'disclose' and 'explicate' whatever attitudes I have, and we cannot do without them if we want to make up our mind on something in particular and to make sense of ourselves in general, but there are also ways to thematize my attitudes that run counter to these. With respect to our story, that could mean a conflict between my desire to follow your request and take notice of whatever attitudes are evoked by the question 'What do I *really* feel towards you?', and the desire to fuel my wrath by inciting further negative emotions. Supposing the prior wins out over the latter, I am still not quite there yet because the disinterested

reflection on my attitudes towards you is necessary to make up my mind on you, but it is not sufficient, because for that I need, as per the above, to deliberate on my attitudes towards you.

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To what extent are reflection and deliberation interrelated? Taking into account the above, it seems evident that there are forms of reflection, ways of thematizing my attitudes that involve deliberation: ‘Making up my mind’ on something, i.e. forming coherent attitudes towards something is an activity that necessarily entails deliberation, because one needs criteria for coherence against which a context of attitudes is evaluated, i.e. criteria to identify a conflict among one’s attitudes and criteria to settle it (criteria that tell me which attitudes to affirm and which to reject). I therefore have to deliberate on what counts as a criterium, or if I have already somehow decided on that, I at least need to deliberate on what these criteria demand with respect to the attitudes in question; I need to identify and apply reasons. Not all kinds of reflection entail deliberation, however: we often thematize our own attitudes without deliberating on what they are or should be! Often, we do the opposite and reflect in uncritical (or better: non-critical) ways: as I suggested above, we sometimes simply indulge in our attitudes by celebrating them, trying to enhance or intensify them, and so on. This can entail that our thematizations are incoherent, volatile, conflicted, and messy (and often it does), but it does not have to. Suppose I reflect on my relationship to a person by painting a picture – it is clearly possible that I express a thematic awareness of a rich, coherent context of attitudes in this way, but asking me to reproduce the reasoning that led me to my attitude towards that person would miss the point. There are forms of reflection that are purely evocative and privative.

Whenever I thematize my attitudes towards something with the concern for coherence, however, I can articulate that concern in a manner accessible for others – as the question what attitudes I should have towards something, or whether it would be better (for me or for anyone) to identify with such and such attitudes (Tugendhat, 2003:32-35). Becoming thematically aware of my attitudes in reflection, I can articulate them in a manner that allows others to form attitudes towards them without having any immediate awareness of them. In contrast to the evocative aspects of reflection which presuppose immediate awareness (I, and only I, can answer the

question what my attitudes towards a person are by asking myself the question in an evocative manner; I then intend to bring whatever attitudes I have to immediate awareness, and as we saw earlier I do not need to deliberate for that), others can deliberate *on my behalf*, and they can of course do that without me articulating my attitudes to the extent that they can rely on their mediate awareness of them. For these reasons it seems warranted to conclude that it is possible to deliberate but impossible to reflect as a group and on behalf of others.

I could even deliberate *on behalf of myself* if I asked myself what attitudes someone who can be identified in a way that I can (e.g. someone who has behaved or failed to behave in a certain way), should have, given a certain scenario; while entirely disregarding any attitudes that I (contingently) happen to have on the matter (I can ask myself what emotions a mother should have towards her children, what beliefs a priest should hold, or have thoughts such as ‘I should be ashamed of myself (but I’m not)’). In certain social scenarios this is precisely what we expect from someone if we want them to exercise judgement in an impartial way and to what degree one trusts someone to judge upon themselves impartially depends on how able one credits the person in question or people in general to be in living up to the demand of deliberating on behalf of themselves. In any case, since my attitudes can obviously not serve as criteria in these instances, I am in need then of criteria obtained elsewhere (the law, my organization’s code of conduct, standards set by my culture, etc.).<sup>10</sup> That I deliberate so, leaving my 1st-person perspective as it were, is certainly a rare thing (if it happens at all). We probably have to imagine a gradual alteration between different modes of reflection and deliberation to be the normal case, and it is plausible to think that this oscillation can give rise to experiences of self-alienation as I encounter myself as a thing with

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<sup>10</sup> Does that mean that I can deliberate unreflectively? I would say yes, since there is no thematization of my own attitudes involved in the deliberation, though one could of course object that to deliberate on anything means to ask myself what attitude (belief, intention) I should assume towards the matter at hand by referring to my attitudes (beliefs) about whatever criteria I seek to apply, and therefore amounts to a thematization of my attitudes. Fair enough. I am not so concerned with the definitions, what matters is that the activity of deliberating on something need not be a reflective enterprise in the sense of thematizing my attitudes *as my attitudes*, for I can deliberate on things other than my own attitudes, adhering to criteria that are equally outside the domain of my attitudes – along the same lines, our efforts to deliberate on our own behalf can be utterly inconsequential with respect to what attitudes we do have and identify with (to the point that we can even fail to notice). Insofar as a thematic awareness of my own attitudes is trivially necessary for deliberating on them, reflection is of course a precondition for ‘self-critical deliberation’ (Zahavi, 2005:91),

contingent properties in the world, but also to processes of self-maturation as I learn to examine my behavior from the perspective of my social environment (Zahavi, 2005:95).

I hope these considerations make clear why I wish to speak of two different activities with respect to reflecting and deliberating on something, whilst they certainly also make clear that phenomenally these two are hard to distinguish because they often manifest jointly<sup>11</sup>: when I deliberate on what I or someone else or a group should believe or do, I usually do not get around thematizing whatever attitudes I do factually have towards the matter in question, and when I thematize my attitudes to someone or something, it suggests itself to deliberate on which of these attitudes I should identify with, in particular if they conflict with each other (and thus upset a desire for coherence). In the case of ‘making up my mind’ both go together: evaluating my attitudes towards something with the desire to form a coherent stance is an activity that necessarily involves reflection and deliberation. Engaging in this kind of reflection enables me to the kind of ‘oversight’ I alluded to when introducing the concept of reflection. My attitudes to things, especially persons, tend to be nuanced, layered, and complicated; they require me to make up my mind, lest I run into conflicting emotions, beliefs, and ways to behave. With respect to our story: thematizing the *holistic context* of my attitudes towards you enables me to deliberate on whether the attitudes I am currently immersed in are representative for my general stance on our relationship, and if should, consequently, follow their impulse or if I should rather regulate them to express myself in a different way.

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If I reflect in such way, I engage in what is perhaps the paradigmatic case of making up my mind: making up my mind on what to do. We are then concerned with a particular form of reflection – *reflection on action*. At first, one might equate reflection on action with asking the question whether to act in such and such a way or not, but my effort to discern reflection and deliberation

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<sup>11</sup> One could say that the capacities for reflection and deliberation necessarily coincide, e.g., that both come with rationality, but that’s fine; I do not want to make any claims about the question if beings that engage in reflection will always also engage in deliberation and vice versa – what matters for this investigation is that, phenomenally speaking, reflection and deliberation can be distinguished as different activities.

should indicate that I would disagree with this. I do: weighing possible ways to act to sort out which to affirm and which to reject is what I would describe as *deliberation on action*; and this is an activity I can perform with and on behalf of others whenever I engage in a conversation about what someone who can be identified in such and such a way should do. Notwithstanding, my previously outlined interpretation of the phrase ‘making up my mind’ – striving for coherence in the holistic context of my attitudes towards something – suggests that in such cases we have to do with some intimate interrelation of deliberation and reflection. In any case, when I speak of reflection on action, I do not mean deliberation. Neither do I mean the activity of thematizing my past behavior and its effects, perhaps guided by the intention to ‘make sense of it’, i.e. to form coherent beliefs about my own attitudes. Instead, what I mean with reflection on action is thematizing my attitudes towards my *imminent* behavior. As we will see, reflecting in this way is intimately connected with reflecting on my life.

I already asserted in the course of the discussion of my anger-example that it is intrinsic to my attitudes to incline me to behave in certain ways (for instance, to fear something is to be motivated to evade it). Whenever I become thematically aware of my attitudes towards something, I therefore become aware of their motivational tendencies. In affirming or rejecting these tendencies in deliberation, I apprehend them as reasons to act in certain ways (see Korsgaard, 2009:16); for instance, I am not only driven to run away by fear, I am also aware *that* I am (potentially) acting in this way because I have this attitude<sup>12</sup>, and perhaps because I have identified something in perception that warrants it (Korsgaard, 2009:14). This awareness enables me to make sense of my past and impulsive occurrent behavior, but it also enables me to plan and predict my future behavior (I can deliberate on what someone with my beliefs, desires, etc. should do or will likely end up doing; I can form intentions and expectations), and most importantly, determine my imminent behavior, i.e. I can act for reasons. Thematic awareness is indispensable

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<sup>12</sup> Different attitudes of course inform my behavior in different ways. The perhaps most important distinction to be made is between affective and noetic attitudes: emotions can inform my behavior impulsively, i.e. without me deliberating on them thus apprehending them as reasons, whereas beliefs cannot because I cannot be non-thematically aware of them. Likewise, I can be moved by my desires without being aware of it, but not so by my intentions.

for deliberate action, as opposed to habitual and impulsive behavior. Going one step further, we can say that thematic awareness of my attitudes towards my own imminent behavior not only enables deliberation on how to act, but provokes it – once I become aware that my attitudes incline me to act in certain ways, I put myself in a position to decide on whether to affirm or reject that inclination (Korsgaard, 2009:16). From what I discussed in the previous section, it should have become clear that being able to ‘take a step back’ is necessary to ‘make up my mind’ – to deliberate in search for coherence among my attitudes I need to rely, at least partially, on a disinterested thematization of the holistic context of my attitudes towards something, and at least to the extent that this be possible I need to regulate my immersive involvement into my own attitudes. The considerations we entertained now add to this that ‘taking a step back’ can force me to ‘make up my mind’ – reflecting on (thematizing my attitudes towards) my imminent behavior forces me to deliberate on what attitudes are to inform my behavior; i.e. how I should act (see Zahavi, 2005:98). I earlier said that thematizing my attitudes involves contextualizing them (except perhaps in that special case of disinterested reflection where I merely take note of whatever attitude is on my mind right now) – in the case of reflection on action this is particularly clear, because making up my mind on how to act is to deliberate which of usually several motivations to act I prefer (which is better) and all of these I have to be thematically aware of to weigh them against each other, but even if I ask myself the simpler question whether I should follow the motivational tendency of a single attitude (whether I should do something or not), I have to contextualize it, not only with an awareness of relevant information about my environment (to spell out some instrumental reasoning of what acting on this attitude would entail and to what extent it is possible), but also with reasons that speak for or against it and here I need to engage in disinterested reflection to see what other attitudes I have to the matter at hand and what they incline (if I do not follow some deliberation on my behalf; i.e., in the simplest case, do what I have been told to do). As reflection on action provokes deliberation on action, so does the latter the former.

As we saw previously, it is possible that we express our attitudes in behavior without reflection and deliberation if we act impulsively (our attitudes then function as mere causes, not as reasons

[Korsgaard, 2009:16]). It also seems possible that we act reflectively but without deliberation, that is to say: Reflection on action does not strictly force me to deliberate in that it is possible to reflect on my imminent behavior without putting it into question – that is when I have already made up my mind. Consider the following situation: I am taking a walk on an autumn day and have some kind of a reminiscence about having done the same last year. A nostalgic feeling emerges and I continue my walk with a thematic awareness that I am doing so and that I am having such and such feelings as I am doing it – I could thus engage in extensive thematizations of my attitudes concerning my imminent behavior, yet nothing here calls into question whether I should continue my walk and for what reason; there is no deliberative effort and none would be needed as there is *no conflict* among my attitudes that would upset a desire for coherent attitudes towards my behavior. Making up my mind on how to act means affirming the desire to identify and eliminate (through affirmation and rejection) conflict among the inclinations given by the holistic context of my attitudes towards my possible forms of behavior in some context. The form of reflective deliberation engaged in when making up my mind then is defined by (and has for that matter, other than reflection in general) a specific intent and, therefore, a criterium on whether we do it well or not – the criterium being whether or not we manage to sort out which possibilities to act we regard as better and which as worse (Tugendhat, 2003:54) and, trivially, whether we consider the possibilities given by our attitudinal inclinations at all. Perhaps it is therefore better to speak of how thoroughly I make up my mind – in that goodness here is a question of how comprehensively and how consequentially I deliberate on my pertinent attitudes – or that is what is meant by making up my mind successfully anyways. Accordingly, the outcome of making up my mind on how to act is a specific attitude – an intention to act in such and such a way.

Comparing to this, the outcome of reflection generally is unspecific; when thematizing my attitudes I can end on some emotion, thought, desire, and so on, and without presupposing some specific intent, I would be unable to give any criteria on whether that's a satisfactory outcome or not. Still, throughout this investigation I referred to reflection as an activity, and it is important in this respect to note that reflection as an activity *is itself a form of deliberate action* and therefore necessarily involves some intent. To be sure, it is certainly possible that I engage in undeliberate

thematizations of my attitudes (being eagerly caught up in my perpetual internal chatter, I constantly do so), but this is precisely why we would not speak of reflection in these cases (our internal chatter is one of the things we can be immersed into and from which we need to ‘take a step back’). I already distinguished different forms of reflection by their respective intents; notably, that included the form of disinterested reflection that is distinguished (warrants its name) by its special intent to merely note how it is like to experience something and I can pursue this for its own sake or to the end of making up my mind thoroughly on something. If we take into account that our attitudes come with intrinsic motivational inclinations, it is natural to think that they incline us to reflect in particular ways or to reflect at all. That is to say I can not only be unreflectively ‘blind with rage’ in the sense that my attention is completely absorbed by my feelings of wrath (my immersion into my attitudes prevents me from making myself thematically aware of these attitudes), I could also be reflectively so, in the sense that my wrath at you provides me with an inclination to thematize the holistic context of my attitudes towards you in an adverse way or to only evocate those attitudes that are coherent with my wrath (that is to say, my attitude inclines me to indulge in it or not to make my mind up thoroughly). I am then ‘blind’ insofar as thematizing my attitudes with their respective motivational intent prevents me from disinterestedly noticing what my attitudes in general are; thus, an effort to moderate them is required to that end. ‘Taking a step back’ entails the affirmation of an intent for disinterested reflection against any competing inclinations. Sure enough, I do not need to be aware that I have a certain intent when thematizing my attitudes, I do not need to thematize my reflective intent. But if I do so, I am thematically aware that I am thematizing my attitudes with some specific concern (insofar as acting reflectively means to thematize my attitudes towards my imminent behavior as I engage in it, we could say, perhaps a bit strangely, that I reflect reflectively), and since reflection is a deliberate action that means I have made up my mind on how to reflect. The outcome of this is precisely what I articulate when saying something like ‘I need to take a step back and make up my mind on what to do with our relationship’.

Just as it is possible for me to become thematically aware of and deliberate on my intent to make up my mind, I can become thematically aware of and deliberate on the criteria I operate with



when doing so – I can be thematically aware not only of how I reflect, but also of how I deliberate. That is to say, it is possible that I do not merely affirm whatever attitudinal inclinations or other considerations that could serve as reasons I hold to be decisive for the outcome of my deliberation, but that I also deliberate on whether I should affirm or reject the reasons on which my deliberation is founded – it is possible that I deliberate *critically*, in that my deliberation encompasses and thus questions its own criteria. I can deliberate critically on all sorts of things (I can deliberate on a matter by adhering to my organization’s code of conduct, but then ask myself what justifies the rules affirmed by the code of conduct), but deliberating critically on my own attitudes towards something discerns a special mode of ‘making up my mind’, which I want to call *critical reflection*. What I mean with critical reflection is to thoroughly make up my mind on something by genuinely asking myself how it is like for me to experience it and what criteria I should justifiably apply when identifying myself with my experience in a certain way (by affirming some attitudes constitutive of my experience and rejecting others) – critical reflection encompasses an intent to both reflect disinterestedly and deliberate critically. In the case of reflection on action, reflecting critically means to engage in an activity to thematize the holistic context of my attitudes towards the context of my imminent behavior in a disinterested manner, by asking myself in what possible ways they incline me to act and which of these I should affirm as determinants of an intention to inform my imminent behavior (and which others I should reject for my attitudes as I am aware of them and as I express them in my behavior to be coherent), while asking myself what criteria I should affirm to accomplish this.

That sounds complicated! To spell out what it implies, let us refer back to our anger-example. What do I need to do if I want to reflect critically on what to do, now that I am angry about you? Critical reflection entails me to aspire to comprehensiveness: that means to become aware in immediate and mediate ways of what attitudes I could possibly be aware of – I thus have to ask myself what my attitudes relevant to the matter at hand are, and that means I have to be ready to evocate what attitudes I have towards our relationship and the respective forms of behavior that constitute it (including whatever you have done to make me angry) and to deliberate on what other attitudes could be expressed by that behavior that I am not immediately aware of. If I want

to reflect critically, I need to do so in a disinterested way, that means I need to take a step back and not let my occurrent anger get in the way of taking into account what other emotions, beliefs, desires, intentions, etc. I have towards the two of us. Taking these into account, I will be confronted with motivational tendencies that will likely demand conflicting ways of expression, therefore I will, besides figuring out how exactly to follow up on any particular inclination (I can express my anger in so many ways), have to deliberate which of these attitudes I really identify with – and if I do that thoroughly, I will form a coherent attitude towards the overall context at hand (our relationship). If I want to reflect critically, this entails that I deliberate on the criteria which I rely on when doing so, e.g. I could in this case ask myself how my conception of friendship should be defined and whether it is seriously offended by what you have done (and I should therefore stay mad at you, and possibly tell you that we are history) or whether the offense is benign. Insofar as I can always ask why I should affirm certain reasons (I could question why I should uphold any conception of friendship), it is easy to see how I can fall in some infinite regress when reflecting critically on my attitudes. For now, let us just say that I have to stop somewhere but that explicitly deliberating on the reasons of my decision (at all) is enough to comply with the criteria of critical reflection. Now, reflecting critically alone does not secure a certain path of action to become reality. It just leaves me with a certain intention (maybe, to forgive you in light of everything we have been through and how good of an example of friendship that is), but if that intention really determines my behavior in the end is another question (my anger might win after all, or what other factors can determine my ultimate actions).

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I hope these considerations make clear that reflecting on something is a rather broad phenomenon, and that there are so many ways for me to respond to your request to make up my mind, of which the particular mode of critical reflection described above is just one (a particularly challenging one that we rarely adhere to in the spur of the moment, we usually need to literally step back from the situation and take time for that). As we saw, since reflection is a deliberate action, it is itself subject to the quarrels of conflicting inclinations our own attitudes continuously throw us into and that gives plausibility to the nature of our factual efforts to reflect which usually seem to entail

oscillations between different modes of reflection but rarely a focused and systematic commitment to one particular way of thematizing our attitudes – reflection is a convoluted and messy affair, not only in description but also in experience. Now, however this may play out in my reaction to your request for reflection, consider this continuation to the story, involving a possible reply of mine: ‘I cannot stay mad at you. I just *care* about you too much!’.

I have thus made up my mind on our relationship (however thorough or critical my effort may have been) and affirmed some benevolent attitudes towards it while rejecting my anger. With that, I have decided that my concern for our relationship is greater than the concern for whatever was upset by your actions, thus causing my anger (for instance, my concern for my car, if what made me angry was that you destroyed it). This seems to add a new facet to our investigation, but it really is just the flip-side of what we already established! My attitudes constitute my relations to things; affirming and rejecting them in coherent ways posits these things as matters of (greater or lesser) concern to me. What is new is the concept of caring: Caring about something means to affirm it as a suitable end to my actions, something I am motivated to act *for* (see Tugendhat, 1979:177), thus giving me criteria to affirm or reject inclinations when deliberating on what to do (Frankfurt, 2004a:16,22; 2004b:173). Whenever I engage in an effort to thoroughly make up my mind on what to do about something, I inquire into whether and how much I care about it, in that I question to what degree the holistic context of my attitudes towards it compels me to determine my behavior in ways that sustain it in general or specific ways. Since caring means to affirm *something* (rather than some attitude towards it), caring about something provides for coherence in my motivations (Frankfurt, 2004a:16-17).

Finding that I care about something does establish it as a concern, thus affirming inclinations to sustain it, but it does not follow from this that I should or will in fact sustain it, because I can conclude, in deliberation on action, that the inclinations I have to sustain it do not suffice to determine my intention (Frankfurt, 2004a:19) – I could care more about something else, I could follow someone’s imperatives or some desire of my own even if they go against what I care about, I could care for something only instrumentally and there are better means available, and so on. But to the extent that I do express my concerns for what I care about through action, my behavior

becomes intelligible as informed by diachronic goals (Frankfurt, 2004a:23). Insofar as I can follow the inclinations of attitudes which I am unaware of in my behavior, I can be oblivious of what I care about (Frankfurt, 2004a:21), though I as well as others can of course deliberate on what my behavior reveals about my apparent concerns. This includes in particular my reactions to events that threaten the existence of whatever it is that I care about. Making up my mind on something can therefore involve to ask myself how it would affect me if it were sustained or eliminated (for instance, I can find out how much I care about our friendship by imagining how indifferent I would be to its end). As far as reflection on action is concerned, I can anticipate the backlash of my imminent behavior by asking myself how I would be affected by the effects of my possible actions on the matter at hand (see Tugendhat, 1979:208). Caring about something entails being concerned about its existence, both as an end to my actions and as something to be affected by (see Heidegger, 2006:192) – with respect to the example: That I care about our relationship entails that I am ready to become active in (at least some) ways necessary to maintain it (such as forgiving you for upsetting me) and to suffer (at least to some extent) what satisfactions and frustrations come with it (such as being angry).

Whenever I make up my mind, I am usually confronted with more than just a single concern. Thoroughly making my mind up on how to act then involves sorting out what things are at stake in the context of my imminent actions and which of them I care most about. It is thus possible for me to invoke my concern for these things as reasons to form coherent intentions on what to do (though, again, it is still possible that I invoke things other than my concerns as reasons, such as imperatives or convictions about what someone like me should do – in the example, I could decide to give up our relationship despite caring deeply about it, because my therapist convinced me that it hopelessly fails to live up to any acceptable conception of a good relationship). Insofar as making up my mind goes, sorting out what I *do* care (most) about to invoke it as a reason or to put it aside for better reasons is as far as I need to go. It is only when I reflect critically that I question the reasons to inform my deliberation, including my concerns about what's at stake, to ask myself whether I should affirm these or not. The more extensively I engage in this effort, the likelier it becomes that this question evolves into a question of what my concerns should be. When

I reflect critically, I always potentially ask myself to what extent I *should* care about something and what I should at all care about (Frankfurt, 2004c:186-187). I will pick up on this thought in the next section; for now, let us recapitulate what I discussed so far.

I used the phrase ‘taking a step back to make up my mind’ to structure my attempt to describe what we mean when we say we intent to reflect on something to the end of forming a coherent stance towards it. Translating the allegory into a descriptive language provided the occasion to discern reflection and deliberation, but also to describe their interrelatedness. Discussing the phenomenon of reflecting on action showed how the ability to thematize my own attitudes and the ability to identify with them (affirming or rejecting them) make it fundamentally possible to act for reasons (Frankfurt, 2004b:175) rather than impulses. Apprehending reflection itself as a deliberate action helped to locate my efforts to thematize my own attitudes with various intents in the grander context of the various inclinations that come with these attitudes themselves, and outlined how my efforts to ‘take a step back’ and ‘make up my mind’ mutually call for each other. Finally, I discerned critical reflection as a particular mode of thoroughly making up my mind on something; one that puts into question what reasons, including my concerns for the matter at hand, I should affirm when forming coherent motivations to guide my active involvement with the world and the things in it.

This concludes a perhaps rather lengthy way of explaining what I mean when I speak of reflecting on something (and how it relates to what I mean when I speak of deliberating on something). On the upside, the investigation now rests on a terminological fundament that will provide a context to the ideas central to its theme, ‘living a reflective life’. Before I get to the explication and discussion of this theme, I will in a final intermediate step towards that discussion outline a particular case of reflecting on something: the activity of reflecting on my life.

#### **4.3. REFLECTING ON ONE’S LIFE**

The examples of ways to reflect I gave so far had one thing in common: they were instances of reflecting on something other than myself, i.e., ways to thematize my attitudes towards something that is not me. That leaves out a set of, arguably crucial and common, ways to reflect – those in

which I thematize my attitudes towards myself. How do we have to think, based on what has been established, about self-reflection?

As should have become clear, I can refer to myself in just the same way I refer to other things. Just as I can thematize my beliefs, emotions, desires, etc. towards the behavior and appearance of another person so I can towards my own. That is, I can reflect on myself *as a thing in the world*. I do so when I thematize such attitudes as confidence in my own capabilities, attraction to my appearance, respect towards my social standing, endorsement of a certain action I have committed, or any of the less favorable attitudes I may hold towards myself – and these are all attitudes towards myself another person could have and, consequentially, thematize. Granted, the way in which I reflect on myself in this way typically differs from the ways in which others reflect on me (irrespective of the question whether they at all hold the same attitudes – they might distrust my capabilities, be repelled by my appearance, and so on). For instance, while the attitudes described above would incline me to think of myself in favorable terms as it would another person (likewise, their opposites would incline me to despise myself as it would another person), my reflection could also produce such attitudes as self-esteem and self-doubt. Nonetheless, in these instances, we could say, I refer to myself from 3rd-person perspective because reflecting on myself in these ways is accessible for another person in similar ways. Thematizing my attitudes towards myself in such ways certainly warrants to be called self-reflection. But it is not what I wish to talk about in this section (or not primarily, anyways). Rather, I want to distinguish from this another mode of self-reflection that necessarily involves referring to myself from 1st-person perspective – reflecting on my life, in particular: making up my mind on how to live. As we will see, the latter is a concern I affirm implicitly or explicitly whenever I engage in critical reflection.

I ended the previous section on the notion that critical reflection prompts me to identify and question my concerns – to ask the question what I do and what I should care about. It does so because to reflect critically I need to both make myself aware of the holistic context of attitudes I have towards something (in contrast to merely deliberating on behalf of myself), while also (in contrast to reflecting in uncritical ways) deliberating on what attitudinal motivations or other reasons should determine in what way I identify with this context, i.e., which of these attitudes I

am to affirm and which to reject. This, however, is nothing else than determining what concerns I do have towards the thing in question, and which of these I want to endorse as legitimately representing the stance I want to adopt towards it (Frankfurt, 2004a:16). Why do I always implicitly affirm a concern about how to live when I sort out in what way I care about some particular thing? Because the way I care about particular things, that is the way I am concerned about them as ends to my actions and as being affected by them, ultimately depends on what attitudes I have towards my life as a whole (see Tugendhat, 2003:94). Reflecting on my life, thematizing these attitudes, therefore naturally prompts critical reflection on my various concerns, as critical reflection on particular concerns prompts me to thematize what attitudes I have towards my life in general. Let me elaborate on this and corroborate my suggestion from a number of lenses all of which, however, pertain to the same phenomenon.

The first argument to make here is that my attitudes towards my life as a whole provide me with final ends that legitimate and shape the plurality of my concerns about particular things. Let us use as an example a situation where I attempt to thoroughly make up my mind on what to do. Whenever I reflect critically on action, I make myself aware of and evaluate ‘what’s at stake’, i.e., the concerns established by my attitudes towards my imminent behavior. In the cases where I am in need of critical reflection, I am usually confronted with a conflict among my concerns, which threatens a coherent stance on the things in question, or the world at large. It is of course possible that I do not thematize and deliberate on my underlying concerns, but if I reflect critically, I necessarily will as they form the motivations for my possible resolves (Tugendhat, 1979:193), and I will therefore be aware of the need to settle on a hierarchy among my various concerns. Questioning my concerns in such manner, I will need to discern things I care about only instrumentally from those that I care about as ends to themselves (see Frankfurt, 2004b:185), and among these I again need to identify those that are most important to me. Thus, the question if I should care about a particular thing naturally leads to the question what I should care (more) about. But the latter question, if asked thoroughly, escalates to the question of what I should affirm as my ultimate concerns, which is nothing else than the question how I want to live (Tugendhat, 2003:94) – when I raise this question I sometimes do so by asking ‘what it (life) is

about' for me. In other words, asking myself what I should at all care about is tied to a concern about how to 'get it right' in life (Frankfurt, 2004b:180).

I so far never explicitly problematized what I called the 'desire for coherence', though it featured great prominence in the investigation since it provides the intent and criterium for the kind of reflection I discussed with reference to the phrase 'making up my mind'. The best explanation I can think of to make sense of the motivational inclination to monitor and evaluate one's various attitudes on particular things so as to comply with a coherent motivational stance towards the world as a whole is that it is rooted in a desire to live purposefully, that is a life in which the totality of one's behavior is pursuant to a set of concerns established by the totality of one's attitudes. To have such concerns and, consequently, pursue them in action, I must identify with my experience of the world in particular ways – caring is essential for a purposeful life (Frankfurt, 2004a:16). What I care about at large constitutes what concerns I have towards the world at large; it specifies my life conception (Frankfurt, 2004a:22). When I attempt to make up my mind on how to live, I thematize what I care about at large, and that means I potentially thematize all motivational inclinations established by whatever attitudes I have towards all things in the world. Reflecting on my life means to *thematize and form attitudes towards the total context of my attitudes*. Whenever I reflect critically on my life, I ask myself what stance to assume towards the world, or how to identify with my experience at large. In other words, a conception of how to live always involves a motivation to experience the world in certain ways in the future. With respect to reflection in general, we can say: Reflecting on my life means to thematize my attitudes towards no particular context, but towards the underlying holistic context that is established by my life. The reason that I introduced this concept via an elaboration on the phenomenon of critical reflection is owed to the special relation between the two: Insofar as reflecting critically on something in particular prompts me to evaluate my concerns in an ever-broader context, it naturally prompts ways to thematize the holistic context of my life (see Tugendhat, 2003:94).

Since the claim that critical reflection leads to reflecting on my life, and vice versa, will be important for the central phenomenon of this investigation and therefore should be made as plausible as possible, I want to deepen this consideration a bit further. I so far established that my



motivational attitudes provide me with ultimate concerns, which I may or may not thematize explicitly when reflecting critically, but to the extent that I am aware of them and identify with them they form part of what could be described as my life conception, which determines what stance I want to assume towards my life at large. But in what way amounts thematizing my ultimate concerns to a reflection on my life? My life, that is (if not only, then at least also) the time between my birth and death! I earlier said that the experiential character of my attitudes is defined by what they are about, so there must be something it is like to thematize attitudes towards this something that I call 'my life', and these attitudes must somehow be involved in thematizing my ultimate concerns. When introducing the concept of reflection, I mentioned that thematizing my attitudes is reliant on a temporal context in that I need to retain the awareness of an attitude to thematize it. Later, I defined reflection on action as thematizing my attitudes towards my imminent actions, and thereby also as an activity that presupposes an awareness of some temporal context; so does reflecting on my life, only that in this case we are confronted with attitudes towards a distinguished temporal context in that the context of my life is not only constituted by the way I am directed at a world of things in my concerns, but also as a temporal context spanning from my birth to my death (see Heidegger, 2006:234). Both aspects are intimately connected since to articulate any concerns that would qualify as a life conception, I necessarily need to have and be able to thematize attitudes that transcend my immediate situation in the world, and instead project on my possible future forms of behavior, attitudes, and events; or, the other way round, because I can thematize and evaluate alternative ways to act, my behavior is not merely informed by inclinations towards things within my immediate spatiotemporal presence, so that I can form attitudes towards my future at large, which I am therefore aware of as something I am concerned about (Tugendhat, 2003:34-35). This concern manifests down to the very fundamental possibilities of affirming or rejecting my life by having attitudes towards it that incline me to live it or not (see Tugendhat, 1979:194), and it is easy to see how the intention to continue my life at all is fundamental for all particular initiatives within it. In other words; as soon as I care about anything at all, I also care about how to live my life in at least the basic sense that I am inclined to affirm its continuation (Tugendhat, 2003:92). Hence, a phenomenon whose significance for

reflecting on my life can hardly be overestimated and has thus been emphasized in this context (Heidegger, 2006; Tugendhat, 1979; Yalom, 1980) is death. The reason is that death establishes a firm boundary to the context of my life in that it completely negates my capacity to become active in the pursuit of my concerns or be affected by them and in that it forms the boundary of the temporal context that is my life – what is imminent in death is ‘nothing’, because in the moment of my death I have no future (Tugendhat, 2003:99). Becoming aware of the always looming possibility of my own death thus produces a thematic awareness of the context at stake (Heidegger, 2006:250; Tugendhat, 2003:104, 1979:234): the awareness of death inevitably triggers a reflection on my life (unless I suppress it). This also makes plausible the life-altering effect that near-death experiences or experiences of the death of others can have, i.e., their being conducive to reflecting critically on one’s life (Yalom, 1980). We call these situations ‘extreme’, not only because they produce extraordinarily strong affective attitudes, but also because what’s at stake here is my existence, the totality of my experience and behavior. Insofar as the possibility of death can become a concern to the extent that we can choose to bring it about, acting in any purposeful way entails a rejection of this possibility – to reverse the above: as soon as I have decided to seize my future in whichever way, I express a (negative) concern about my own death. This is of course a concern I do not usually thematize, unless it has become doubtful whether I should reject it or not. Notwithstanding this extreme, I am usually concerned about how the future might be, and that is expressed through attitudes such as hope, anxiety, or despair, and these form the basis of perhaps the most common forms of reflecting on my life.

This brings me to a third and final consideration to explicate the connection between the way I am concerned about particular things and reflecting on my life, which is that the way I am affected by particular things and events in the world is determined by what attitudes I have towards my life in general. In particular, my affective attitudes are influenced by what mood I am in, and, combining these two claims, I want to argue that moods are attitudes towards one’s life (or at least that there is a type of moods which can be seen in that way, and which I address with the above consideration). Earlier, when introducing the concept of mood, I mentioned that I am sometimes unaware of what my affective attitudes are about. That is to say, I have affective attitudes of a sort

that involve no concern about a particular thing in the world – for instance, boredom does not incline me to any particular behavior with respect to anything, much rather it is an affective state that consists in the painful awareness of the absence of (intense) motivational inclinations (Frankfurt, 2004a:54). These attitudes often involve what is perhaps best described as ‘strange feelings’, meaning I cannot clearly associate adequate terms to describe them; they are *experientially obscure*, not only with respect to what they are about, but also with respect to their kind. Sometimes we therefore resort to figurative language and say such things as that we feel ‘empty’, ‘at home’, or ‘complete’ (Ratcliffe, 2005:45). Despite their experiential obscurity, that is the fact that I am not always thematically aware of what kind of affections these attitudes are and what they are about, I relate through these attitudes to the world in significant ways (Ratcliffe, 2009:351) – that can of course become thematic in reflection. This is to say that being in such affective states amounts to an awareness of the way I am concerned about possible future situations of life (Ratcliffe, 2009:355), and this goes hand in hand with our earlier claim that they are intrinsically motivational (Slaby, 2008:433). A particular kind of attitude that is frequently discussed in this context is anxiety and its numerous manifestations (see Heidegger, 2006; Yalom, 1980). In states of anxiety, I may experience my life as meaningless or fragile, and here it is easy to see the connection to my earlier elaborations on the context of life: the particular significance of anxiety lies in the awareness of a lack of concerns sufficient for the pursuit of a viable life conception, or the awareness that I could possibly die at any point in time. What matters for the argument here is that in the case of anxiety we have a type of attitude that is not directed at nothing, but that constitutes a significant experience of something, since, even though attitudes of this sort do not constitute a relation to some particular thing in the world, they are attitudes that pertain my presence in the world at large (Crane, 1998:10; see Ratcliffe, 2005:45). Both forms of anxiety I alluded to are propositional attitudes towards the context of my life (see Tugendhat 1979:209)<sup>13</sup>. Of course, not all moods have to be seen in that way, because I can have affective attitudes towards

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<sup>13</sup> The thesis that moods are attitudes towards my life entails no prejudice about whether their *cause* is rooted in a life conception: I could, for purely physiological causes, have moods that still manifest attitudes towards my life (think of how the outlook on life changes in persons suffering from bipolar disorder, whether or not it is genetically induced).

more specific contexts, such as the autumn-day walk I mentioned earlier (see Ratcliffe, 2005:45). Nor are moods the only affective attitudes I can possibly have towards my life. For instance, as soon as I reflect on my life by thematizing my overall mood, it is likely that I become aware of feelings, intentions, and so on, that are explicitly about my life. As far as reflecting on my life is concerned, the relevant phenomena are those affective attitudes that are directed at the context of my life, or at sub-contexts thereof that are important, i.e. relevant for my life conception.

Now, I initiated this line of thought by saying that the attitudes I have towards my life determine what attitudes I have towards particular things. This is intuitively plausible with respect to my volitional attitudes; for instance, what I intent to do with a particular thing in instrumental ways depends on how that advances my ultimate concerns, but a similar claim can be supported with respect to our affective attitudes. In this case, it seems that the spectrum of affective states I am capable of experiencing hinges on my underlying mood; e.g., a state of depression can make it impossible to experience hope towards some particular concern (Ratcliffe, 2009:353). Combining both, we can say that how I experience things, i.e. through what kind of attitudes I relate to things, is dependent on the concerns I have (on how I have already identified with the world at large, on how I have made up my mind on how to live), and it is plausible to assume that extreme states with respect to my ultimate concerns will influence how I am affected by subordinate concerns. And insofar a concern about my life is presupposed in any particular concern as we saw, it is also plausible that I am always in some mood towards my life as long as anything affects me at all (Ratcliffe, 2009:356-357). That this is so, is made evident by the fact that I can at all times answer the question ‘How are you?’ evocatively (see Tugendhat, 1979:205). That is to say, my moods are inherently evaluative and thus locate my life within a hedonic range from good to bad (Tugendhat, 1979:207). This is just a consequence of the notion that my affective states are inherently motivational which, again, is just the flipside of the notion that they establish concerns towards the things they are about. Finally, the connection between attitudes towards the context of one’s life and those towards particular things outlined here makes plausible the fact that my affective attitudes towards things in general are essential criteria for any evaluation of my well-being (Slaby, 2008:431). These considerations entail that as soon as I deliberate on why

a certain thing makes me feel good or bad, I am confronted with my concerns towards it. As reflection on action naturally leads to making up my mind on what I care about (*qua* deliberation on what to do and for what reasons), so does reflection on how I feel (*qua* hedonic valence). Empirically, these different forms of thematizing my volitional and affective attitudes towards certainly overlap etc. – as should be clear by now, thematizing my attitudes towards my actions can end on emotional attitudes (e.g. pride or hope) and thematizing my emotional attitudes can end on intentions, and so on. To summarize the ideas developed so far in this section: In my attitudes I relate to my life as imminently confronting me with an approaching future that I am concerned about and that I have to form a stance towards (Tugendhat, 1979:177). Consequently, as soon as I attempt to (sincerely) make up my mind on something, I reveal that I care about my life.

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With that we have enough to address the phenomenon of reflecting on my life in its own right. The considerations above established a way of relating to myself from 1st-person perspective: having attitudes towards the holistic context of my attitudes; a context that is embedded in the spatiotemporal dimension of the world wherein all objects of concern and all forms of behavior manifest, and that I affirm and make myself vulnerable to as soon as I care about anything at all – in short, having attitudes towards my life. Reflecting on my life means to thematize those attitudes that I have towards the whole context of my factual and possible attitudes, it involves forming attitudes towards all the things I care about and all forms of behavior I do or could exhibit to sustain and pursue them as well as the emotional responses that form the basis for deliberate evaluations of my factual concerns. And such efforts can of course, and usually do, involve thematizing myself as a thing in the world – reflecting on my life can be a mediation between the immediate and mediate awareness of my experience at large – as well as deliberation on what my concerns likely are or preferably should be. This may all sound abstract, but it is perhaps helpful to remember that it is, essentially, a more sophisticated expression of the starting point of this investigation: when I reflect on myself (in a disinterested manner), I explicate and articulate how I experience my life. As we saw, reflection is a broad phenomenon that can manifest in as many

ways as we relate to the world in our attitudes. Consequently, the outcome (as the intent and theme) of reflecting on my life can be various: it can be a mood, such as boredom, lightheartedness, sorrow, fulfillment, gratitude, restlessness, or dullness – possibly a different mood than the pre-reflective one, or the same experienced in a different intensity; an opinion about whether I am actually well or not, if I critically question my own moods (see Tugendhat, 2003:90); a desire or intention on what to do with my life and, in extremes, whether to continue it, as well as affective responses to that, such as hope or despair; a belief on what my attitudes and behavior at large say about what I care about, and affective responses to that, such as self-doubt or clarity of purpose; an opinion about the worthiness and feasibility of what I identify as my life conception, and affective responses to such an opinion or to the opinion of others, such as feelings of self-worth; and so on<sup>14</sup>. Some of these necessarily involve mediations between 1st- and 3rd-person perspective; for instance, the belief that others would likely affirm my way of life seems essential for feelings of self-worth (Tugendhat, 1979:270). This is messy to describe (and no less to experience) but not surprising given the reflexive nature of our attitudes (I can have beliefs about desires, intentions about emotions, and so on) and things are further complicated by possible combinations of 1st- and 3rd-personal ways of thematizing myself, and the involvement of efforts to identify with my attitudes in different ways. But it is a conceptual result that is hardly surprising and that, I hope, gives confidence in the definition in play. We find, of course, on this level the forms of reflection that I distinguished *qua* their intents in the previous sections: The cases of asking myself how I feel about my situation in life and of encouraging myself to tackle my future decisively represent instances of disinterested and regulative reflection, respectively, whereas thoroughly asking myself how to live presents us with a case of critically reflecting on my life, and it is perhaps unsurprising that I want to discuss the latter in greater detail.

When I try to make up my mind on how to live, I aim for holistically coherent attitudes; a unified stance towards my experience as a whole. This concern can be formulated as the question how to

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<sup>14</sup> The German language has a number of terms that I find do justice to the notion that attitudes in question are directed towards one's life, such as 'Lebensgefühl' (life feeling), 'Lebensanschauung' (life perception), 'Lebensansatz' (life approach), or 'Lebenswille' (life will).

live and that entails the question of what concerns I should live for, what I should care (most) about. Critically reflecting on my life means to affirm a concern to put into question my concerns. I earlier distinguished reflection from deliberation, and the same can of course be done here, so let me quickly distinguish reflecting on my life and deliberating on my life<sup>15</sup>. Above I already provided some cases of reflecting on life that do not necessarily involve deliberation – indulging in my moods is one of them. When I deliberate on my life, I weigh inclinations to affirm or reject what reasons (if I deliberate reflectively these involve, at least partly, my concerns) offer themselves for a possible life conception, and if I do that critically that involves making myself aware of what these reasons are and why they should qualify for a suitable life conception. This is an intent I can articulate so that others can deliberate on what I should do with my life as well as on what it is that I likely care about, but only I can reflect on my life in a 1st-personal way because only I have an immediate awareness of how it is like to live my life. It is possible (to an extent) both that I live in unreflective and in uncritical ways. For instance, I could (dis-)regard my moods as contingent distractions from the pursuit of a solidified life conception, or I could follow their whims without questioning if that leads me to live my life in a way I can justify before myself and others.

Now, since others cannot thematize my attitudes as being immediately aware of them, the question how I should live, if raised to others, has the meaning ‘How should someone live who can be described like me?’, and, since these descriptions can be regarded as contingent or irrelevant, this question can be generalized to the question what one (anyone, irrespective of how they can be described) should do with one’s life and what one should care about – the question for the good life (MacIntyre, 2007:218). Asking the question how to live in that form suggests, or at least inquires into the possibility, that there are some factors that give rise to ultimate concerns that are universally desirable and that could therefore be described as ‘the good’. Addressing this question in its own right would certainly be far too vast an undertaking to form part of this investigation,

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<sup>15</sup> Again, I am not making any claims about any necessary co-manifestation of the two; e.g., one could believe that forming reflective attitudes towards one’s life is possible only for a creature with rational capabilities like ours (see Frankfurt, 1971:12).

but I do want to quickly outline those aspects that I believe are of importance for an integral description of the phenomenon of reflecting on one's life.

The first point here is that whenever I deliberate on something, I need to affirm reasons to guide my decision, so in the case of deliberating on how to live (Frankfurt, 2004c:185). In many cases of deliberating on something it is enough to simply rely on the reasons given by my concerns towards the matter at hand, in particular those that I have already made up my mind upon. But since the question of how to live pertains my concerns generally, not only those that are themselves legitimated by being instrumental to other concerns, I necessarily always put the criteria of any possible response to the question into question themselves: deliberating on how to live is 'self-referential', in that to answer what should be of importance in my life I need to have settled somehow on what is important in life (Frankfurt, 2004a:24). I am therefore left with what motivational force comes with my attitudes, in particular those that constitute the concerns that form candidates for my life conception which I then have to affirm as self-legitimizing, or I have to rely on reasons provided by things other than my own attitudes. In other words, one way to answer the question is to take a stance: 'this is what I care about (and I have no further reasons)'. The other way, broadly speaking, is to raise the question for the good life to others and go by what life conceptions are suggested by them. Things are more complex than these descriptions suggest, because the latter does not necessarily require that I actually go ahead and ask someone, but entails the adoption of normative standards and expectations inherent to the social environment I live in, which allows me to deliberate anonymously on my own behalf ('how should a good father live?', 'how should a responsible citizen live?', and so on<sup>16</sup>). Lastly, it is of course conceivable that these two ways produce the same result so they do not have to instill any conflict when trying to settle on a way to live. It might even be so that deliberating critically on one's life, if done thoroughly, will produce life conceptions that are necessarily universal, i.e., against which my factual attitudes are to be seen as purely contingent. Theoretical accounts that advocate for this option are effectively in pursuit of a way to eliminate the chasm between autonomy and universality (Rorty

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<sup>16</sup> More on this in the next section.



1989:XIII) that opens with individually diverging concerns. What matters for this investigation is that, from this standpoint, the thematization of my factual attitudes is not an integral component of the search for a good life – they suggest the possibility of a critical but unreflective way of identifying a suitable life conception. But if this option fails for whatever reasons (and it is at least thinkable that it does, to phrase it carefully [see Rorty, 1989:26,41,177; Frankfurt, 2004a:28]), I am thrown back into a choice between going by what I care about or by what an anonymous conversation suggests. Again, the real picture is more complex, because these possibilities can of course overlap as I can partake in such a conversation in different ways; e.g., I can answer the question *authoritatively* by pointing to a certain life conception, or *provocatively* by encouraging the other to reflect (and one way to do so *is* to raise the question for the good life, perhaps without allowing a person to give a pre-conceived answer).<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that both answers incorporate a stance on the good life, insofar as the latter presupposes that critically reflecting on one's life is productive to living a good life (assuming the utterance is sincere). There are various considerations that can inform this belief, for instance I could say that my ultimate concerns evade my own authority in that they are involuntary dispositions towards specific things in my life (Frankfurt, 2004c:194) that I just contingently happen to have (I just happen to care about the certain people, things and activities that my life is about), and therefore that asking how to live my life is pointless without disinterestedly reflecting on my factual concerns (Frankfurt, 2004a:26; 2004c:201). This perspective, if taken as an answer to the question for the good life, runs on the claim that coherence among our attitudes, experienced as a harmonic mood, is itself the key criterium for a good life (Frankfurt, 2004b:179). This notion is compatible with a perspective that emphasizes the importance of critically deliberating on my life, because I have to deliberate on whether my beliefs about my ultimate concerns and their coherence are justified (so

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<sup>17</sup> These two modes give, when formalized and expanded to general conceptions, rise to normative approaches to the task of making up my mind on how to live: authoritative ones (such as the ones offered by the monotheistic religions) that promise to relieve me from the task by offering me a life conception, and provocative ones that offer a form of guidance to the task, a meta-conception so to speak. Each come with demands that people can get angry about because they perceive them as a form of power overriding their respective reflective intents: the authoritative ones as denying the intent to live by the outcomes of my own reflections rather than of anonymous deliberations, and the provocative ones as denying the intent not to reflect on my life and instead live by an answer I have settled on in reflection or deliberation, or that I received from elsewhere.

that they can be regarded as authentic self-expressions in line with a well-grounded worldview), to the effect that a self-determined life conception requires critical reflection in that it can neither be reduced to critical deliberation nor to uncritical reflection (Tugendhat, 1979:240f.). In any case, the affirmation of a self-determined response to the question for the good life presupposes the beliefs that, firstly, the way I am confronted with the world, particularly in my moods, can be significantly influenced by my behavior, and, secondly, that reflecting on my life, particularly critically reflecting on my overall behavior by asking what I should do with my life, can produce volitional attitudes that influence my behavior in an adequate way. Both can be doubted in particular instances, albeit perhaps not generally. In any case, this objection provides me with an opportunity to address a weighty question: Why would I not want to reflect on my life?

The answer to this question is a rather straightforward consequence of what has been established so far, if one takes into account one thing: My concerns bind me to things in the world which suffer, without exception, from impermanence and contingency (Tugendhat, 2003:98), and are above that subject to the behavior of others that may have concerns conflicting with my own, so that the satisfaction of my concerns lies substantially outside of my own agency; I have to hope for a fortunate turn of events in the world (Tugendhat, 2003:37). What is true for the things in the world is true for myself, so that reflecting on my life confronts me with the impermanence and contingency of my own life and everything that constitutes it (Tugendhat, 2003:94). This again, by the very nature of critical reflection, *includes my concerns*: Critical reflection confronts me with the doubt experienced as a response to the awareness of incoherence in my attitudes and behavior, or with the always possible realizations that I have lived my life in a way that fails to pursue what I have to be prepared to identify as my actual, previously unaware concerns (Yalom, 1980:276). Even the awareness that the satisfaction of some concerns *is* up to me thus threatens to invoke a range of painful affective responses, such as shame, guilt, and, perhaps most importantly, regret (see Tugendhat, 2003:62). All this instills not only a desire for coherence and stability in my attitudes, behavior, and things they expose me to (Tugendhat, 2003:94), but also a desire to suppress an awareness of distressful attitudes towards my life (Tugendhat, 1979:195). This provides us with an explanation for the phenomenon of unaware attitudes (Yalom, 1980).

To specify this on the level of particular attitudes: When I deliberate on my attitudes, I can identify with my attitudes; e.g., I affirm an attitude *qua* the belief that I should have an emotion and the intention to sustain and intensify it, and when I make up my mind about conflicting attitudes that entails that I reject whatever conflicts with the attitude *qua* the belief that I should *not* have an emotion and the intention to dampen and suppress it. I cannot decide what attitudes I am to have or not to have, but through deliberating on and identifying with (affirming or rejecting) my attitudes, it is possible that I gain a motive to become unaware of attitudes I am (painfully, obstructively, conflictingly) aware of, and, if what we commonly assume to know about human psychology is correct, it is a regular occurrence that I do in fact become unaware of attitudes in this manner (Tugendhat, 1979:144).

Empirically, there of course seems to be a gradual difference between attitudes we are thematically unaware of and those we are unaware of. Think of the following, perhaps more or less covert articulations of timidity facing the prospect of reflecting on one's life: 'Reflection is useless', 'If one always reflects, one never gets to do anything', 'Reflection is dangerous', 'I am scared of reflecting on my life'. One might take issue with my bland categorization of them, especially with respect to the first two, but in my defense: to form a pessimistic outlook on the endeavor to reflect on my life, I need to be engaged in that endeavor already, so what the person is saying is not 'not at all', but 'not further'. It then must be that the prospect of engaging in reflection is evaluated not only with respect to 'on what', and 'how', but also 'how far'. It seems to me that such utterances bear testimony to the fact that we commonly have an intuitive understanding that the outcomes of our reflections are affectively impactful and, potentially, volitionally binding. They are also indicative that we have an, at least implicit, understanding that reflecting critically on one's life means to thematize the holistic context of one's attitudes and therefore confronts one with all those attitudes one wishes not to be aware of (due to their threatening, disturbing, confusing, or hurtful qualities), and that we can anticipate the outcomes of further disinterested reflection and consequently opt for a concern not to engage in it. One way to affirm such an evasive concern is to reflect in regulative ways on my life, that is to indulge in certain attitudes I have towards it. It is thus important to remind that reflecting on my life on its own does not

guarantee a self-determined life conception; reflecting on my life can be obsessive, biased, incohesive, inchoate, circular, inconsequential, and restricted. This goes so far and is so impactful on a person's life that we define many such forms of reflection as psychological anomalies deranging from a (somewhat arbitrary) norm of spontaneous, disinterested, cohesive, comprehensive, purposeful, and open-minded reflection; for instance, depression can manifest in continuous thematizations of my attitudes towards my own life that inescapably reaffirm the ever same hopeless convictions and dreadful affects. There is a crucial difference between reflecting thoroughly or *exhaustively* and reflecting *excessively*.

I hope these considerations make clear that I can be inclined not to reflect on my life, or to reflect on it with an intent to indulge in certain attitudes and to distract myself from others or from reflecting critically, but I think it makes sense to say that what we distract ourselves primarily from in these cases is not (or not primarily) the effort to deliberate but a thematic awareness of and thus a distress suffered by certain attitudes towards one's life. This is an interesting debate and one I would like to continue, but, as I said, it is not my ambition here to exhaustively explain and evaluate this question, or to present any opinions on how one should reflect on life. I just wanted to make plausible that critically reflecting on one's life is a highly particular mode of reflection that is however a particularly important form of reflection on whose prospects, nature, and pursuit different persons tend to have strong and possibly dissenting opinions that are deeply tied to the outlook they have on the activity of reflection as a whole.

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Let us try to recapitulate the thoughts entertained in this section: Reflecting on my life is a form of thematic self-awareness because in becoming thematically aware of my own life, I thematize the attitudes I have towards the holistic context of my own attitudes and behavior, and how I relate, through them, to a world of things, including myself (see Tugendhat, 1979:236). In reflecting thoroughly and disinterestedly on my life several things come together: a distinguished temporal character of reflection insofar as it relies on an awareness of the temporal context spanning from my birth to my death; a distinguished way of referring to the world insofar as I thematize what things in the world I at all care about; a distinguished way to thematize my

attitudes insofar as I form attitudes towards my attitudes as a whole; and, thereby, a distinguished form of relating to myself, which is inherently first-personal insofar as I am confronted with the question of how to live in a way that cannot be handed over to someone else (Heidegger, 2006:135). Embracing this question, affirming the intent to form coherent attitudes towards the overall context of my attitudes and behavior, is essential for the explicit articulation of a life conception that allows me to purposefully act towards diachronic goals; engaging in the activity to reflect critically on my life is a precondition for a self-determined life (Tugendhat, 1979:227). Because an awareness of this question is an essential aspect of self-awareness, the choice to embrace that question can be seen as choosing myself in the sense of assuming responsibility for living my own life, and the choice not to ask it as an escape from myself (Heidegger, 2006:285; Tugendhat, 1979:196).

Motivationally, reflection on my life in general and critical reflection in particular are subject to a complex and converse dynamic. On the one hand, my willingness to reflect critically depends on how I generally and habitually reflect on my life. The reason is that I can anticipate the forms of thematic self-awareness that come with such confrontations, hence my inclination to engage in critical reflection is influenced by my previous reflections on life, in particular those that involved the experience of distressful affective attitudes, and what concerns I consequentially have developed towards the prospect of making myself aware of them. On the other hand, how I generally reflect on my life depends on how I deliberate on my behavior at large, and thereby on how eager I am to reflect critically on it. The reason is that reflection is itself an action so forming attitudes towards the holistic contexts of my behavior will be to form an attitude towards the activity of reflecting on this context (my life). Whether I reflect on my life and how I do that is therefore itself a question that is necessarily answered by my de facto answer to the question of how to live, and, as far as my behavior can be determined by my own intentions, on how I engage in the particular mode of self-reflection that is articulated by the question of how to live, a mode in which I always potentially engage as soon as I reflect on action. In effect, critical reflection can bring about inclinations to cease reflecting critically, but broadly ceasing to reflect critically can alert me to the need of engaging in it, because the less I make up my mind on what my authentic

concerns are, the likelier I will engage in behavior that will elicit attitudes of dissatisfaction. To make sense of these I have to deliberate on what my behavior reveals about what my authentic concerns are, and the better I am aware of what they are, the more I will be inclined to find suitable ways to express them in behavior, leading to critical deliberation on my behavior at large.

With that I conclude my attempt to describe what I mean with reflecting on one's life and its relationship to critical reflection and reflection on action. It is a rather complex phenomenon; more complex than the phrase 'making up my mind on how to live' suggests. Reflecting on one's life is often a hopelessly obscure and convoluted affair, but the broad definition of reflection I advocate for makes plausible why this might be so. What matters for the further investigation is mainly that the attitudes I have towards reflecting critically on my life (how eager I am to make up my mind thoroughly on how to live) can determine my behavior at large (how I end up living my life), and that they are intimately connected both with how I thematize my imminent behavior in whatever situation I am involved in (how I make up my mind on what to do), and with the way I thematize my desires, intentions, emotions, moods, beliefs, etc. towards the overarching context spanning from my birth to my death in the world at large (how I reflect on my life in general). The dynamic relationship between the thematic self-awareness obtained in reflecting on my life on the one side and the specific form of critical self-reflection on the other thus has far-reaching implications on what person I choose to be, and what person I ultimately become.

Finally, one key consideration I maintained throughout my descriptive account is that we have to think of reflection itself as an activity. The practices I engage in by reflecting on things therefore have to be seen as an integral part of the way I live. This also means that there must be forms of particular behavior, and general ways to live that are more or less open to involve reflective activity and thereby be themselves sustained by continuously being reflected upon. This is to say that I can live my life in a more or less reflective way. And with that we are finally ready to directly address the phenomenon at the center of this investigation, which I will do in the next section.

#### 4.4. LIVING A REFLECTIVE LIFE

With the discussion on the phenomenon of reflecting on one's life we have enough to discuss the question central to this investigation: What does it mean to live a reflective life?

If I aspire to a reflective life, I do not only want to reflect on my life in a given moment, I want the way I live my life as a whole to be in some way sustained by the activity of reflecting on it. In a first approach we could describe a reflective life as one in which the attitudes that are decisive for the way I live (the ultimate concerns I pursue over the course of my life and as what kind of a person I thus understand myself to be) are the outcome of continuous reflection. We will have to see to what extent that entails that I reflect critically on my life, but certainly what I would have in mind when describing myself as a reflective person is that I am eager to make myself thematically aware of how I experience my life. A reflective life would then entail a willingness to disinterestedly reflect on the holistic temporal context of my life, to make sense of how my life has been so far (since my birth) and how it should be in the future (until my death).

Does that capture what we would associate with the notion of a reflective life? Perhaps partially, but not completely: We call someone a 'reflective person' who is eager and able to thematize her various attitudes and forms of behavior in their respective contexts, most notably the overarching context of her life and *that of others*! A person who continuously thematizes her attitudes towards her own life while continuously failing to appreciate the fact that the people that play a role in it are also beings that can and do reflect on their lives would – although being highly reflective as a matter of definition – probably not warrant such description, because she would fail to reflect thoroughly and comprehensively in a particular way by excluding a set of considerations. We treat such behavior as anomalies worthy of dedicated thematization and intervention not only because these modes of reflection lead to (self-)harming behavior, but also because they are, by definition, restricted, the person lacks a vital capacity. If this suggestion is adequate, living a reflective life involves an appreciation of the attitudes of others and of their capability to thematize them. The concept of a reflective life then seems to rely on particular ways to act and reflect that exceed the individual's own attitudes and behavior, but to properly examine this hunch we need to address the intersubjective nature of the activity of reflection, in particular of reflecting on one's life.

I so far refrained from any dedicated discussion of this important dimension to not obfuscate matters, but as I emphasized earlier the phenomenon of reflection is misunderstood if we regard it as a solipsistic retreat from our intersubjective experience, because the mediation between 1st- and 3rd-person perspective is vital to most forms of reflection, in particular those on action. As I hope is clear by now, reflecting on my life is necessarily reflecting on the world since forming attitudes towards my life means forming attitudes on what I care about, which is always (also) a comparative attitude to all other available things of concern and thereby an attitude towards the world of things and possibilities as a whole. My concerns bind me to other reflective beings as objects of my concerns, and as being vulnerable to their pursuit of their concerns – in my affective attitudes I am not only confronted with the backlash of my behavior but with that of everyone else's. Living a reflective life entails to make myself thematically aware of and deliberate on their apparent concerns, not only as far as they are instrumental for my concerns, but possibly by making them my own and affirming them in behavior – caring about someone in a non-instrumental way entails that I assume the motivational force of her attitudes as my own (Frankfurt, 2004a:37), and if I do so generally that implies that when I raise the question for the good life I also do so on her behalf. This obviously requires me to have some kind of an awareness of how she reflects on her life, so let me, for now, take a step back from this and address on a more fundamental level the phenomenon of reflecting with others.

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How are my reflections accessible for others? Reflecting on something means to thematize my attitudes towards it and I do that by forming attitudes; every reflection has, as an outcome, a certain attitude, and we saw that for some types of reflection, if done successfully as demanded by their intent, that is a specific kind (an intention for reflection on action), but not for reflection generally. The outcomes of my reflections can, as any other attitude, be expressed in action (and with reflection in action that means, straightforwardly, to follow my intention), and, thematically, in language. Since our attitudes can be obscure for others, and even ourselves, it follows that for any given mode of behavior, observed in isolation, we cannot say to what degree it is informed by preceding reflection, though we can observe behavior in its context and infer probable reflection



(e.g., a person is sad, then changes their job, and is now happy). Apart from that, I can thematize my attitudes expressively through language (simply by talking about them in any way), and I can therefore express the intent, theme, and outcome of any reflection; I may also express an opinion about how I reached the latter, if I reflect critically, that means I provide a reason. When I thematize my attitudes expressively, I reflect performatively (as far as my utterance is sincere; I could lie or just repeat some utterance without understanding it, or I could be a machine – so, as far as we always assume that a person we talk to is self-aware and has an understanding of the words she uses as well as the ways in which we behave, we can take her to reflect when she sincerely thematizes her own attitudes in a meaningful manner<sup>18</sup>). As soon as I know someone to be capable of reflection, I can of course start to see *all* of her behavior as possibly thematized in and expressive of reflection, but if I want to know whether she did in fact reflect on some particular behavior, I have to ask her. To maintain the distinction here between reflection and deliberation, it is important to add: What counts here is not the degree to which a person can give justifications for her actions (this only matters if I want to know if she reflected critically on them); she might even have engaged in anonymous deliberations before acting but without thematizing her own attitudes. For instance, when operating a machine, it of course matters what her beliefs towards the matter at hand are (which interface, according to her, controls what function), but it certainly does not matter whether she became thematically aware of them as her beliefs (it is enough that she is aware *of* her belief that pressing this button performs that action, she needs not be aware *that* she believes so). On the other hand, one can of course reflect expressively, but uncritically; e.g., the question ‘how are you?’ can, in some cases, trigger a tirade of thematizations of a person’s own feelings that lack any sign of a deliberate effort – clearly, these things were on the person’s mind before the question was asked. Because critical reflection is a way of thematizing one’s own attitudes, providing reasons can of course be a way to indicate reflective behavior. In the case of

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<sup>18</sup> Animals most likely cannot reflect *on their lives* and if they could, we’d have no way of telling because even if we can safely assume that some animals have a form of self-awareness as well as attitudes and thereby concerns about things, they have no propositional language or anything comparable. To securely acknowledge someone as being capable of reflecting on themselves we need them to express themselves thematically, and the way human beings do so is through propositional language. But the case is (much) more difficult with respect to reflecting *on something*, because some animals certainly have ways to communicate their concerns.

volitions and actions, the most straightforward way to find out if a person reflected is to simply ask her why she acted in a certain way and continue to do so until she thematizes her attitudes – the difficult thing is that *by asking* I will eventually force the person to reflect so that the answer lies not in the justification itself the person gives (and how good of a reason it is) but in her communicative behavior. As has been noted elsewhere (Dewey, 1910; Schön, 1983): what is, in fact, evidential of reflection – and justifies my beliefs that the person has not (thoroughly) reflected before – is surprise; pause, confusion, asking to clarify or justify the question, and getting angry can all be expressions of reflection. The cases where a person steps back, where the conversation stops are often unthematic expressions of reflective activity that emerge without previous intent, but by surprise; they provide the usual and natural entry points to reflection from our routinely unreflective behavior, and they give rise to the phrase ‘taking a step back’.

The idioms we use to point to reflection are thus expressive of its communicative implications. Let me try to structure their discussion by providing some rudimentary definitions: Firstly, I want to call those events, in particular forms of behavior, that cause a person to reflect *triggers*. Secondly, I want, as I already did, refer to a reflection’s *expressions* as those forms of behavior, in particular those involving explicit thematizations using propositional language, indicative of the attitudes thematized and formed during a reflection as well as those providing its intent. Addressing the phenomenon of reflection with others, we can thus say that, while I cannot reflect on another person’s life (because I have no immediate awareness of her attitudes), I can *aid* her in doing so by triggering her to thematize her pertinent attitudes and being receptive to her expressions if she does so. This entails that I react in a way suitable to affirming what I believe to be her factual reflective intent, or one I think she should have based on what I believe to be her true concerns (as we saw earlier, people can have different intents when reflecting on their lives and we can comply with them or override them when triggering a person to reflect; e.g., I could alert a person to the need of reflecting critically on her life when she is trying to distract herself from an apparent conflict in her concerns, or I could trigger her to indulge in a grateful mood towards her life when she is upset about a particular thing). Conversely, I can let myself be aided to reflect by following a person’s attempts to trigger me to reflect privately or expressively and by being receptive about

what our social behavior and communication says about my apparent attitudes. Reflecting with others, again, can of course be obsessive, convoluted, and so on, and often we aid each other in reflecting in regulative ways to not reflect on certain things, in particular distressful attitudes towards one's life – I can enforce a myth someone has about herself, distract her from a thought, console her in denial, etc. so that she does not have to reflect thoroughly on her life and its challenges. I then may still aid the person because I comply with her intent to (not) reflect in a particular way, but I can also *provoke* her by triggering her in ways according to a diverging deliberation, and if I do that sincerely on her behalf, I still aid her (I then *guide* her), but not if I base it on my own concerns (I then *manipulate* her). Accordingly, a seemingly benign question such as 'how are you?' can have so many meanings: a mere acknowledgement of the other's presence that is not meant as a trigger to reflect; an invitation to express one's affective and evaluative attitudes towards a context both interlocutors are mutually involved in; such an invitation, but pertaining the holistic context of one's life, and thus involving the intention to empathize, to make the other's attitudes my concern, possibly console them and engage in shared deliberation on their concerns<sup>19</sup>; or, a request for a disinterested articulation of whatever attitudes the person has that is probably best exemplified by a situation in which I ask myself the question, which necessarily involves a trigger to reflect as it prompts to evaluate and form attitudes towards one's life.

It is important to note that deliberation is necessary for meaningful communication and thus essential for reflecting with others, as we actualize this capability in various ways to aid others and let ourselves be aided by them. In the most straightforward way, I can ask a person for an opinion on what my attitudes are (they then have to assess my behavior and deliberate on what attitude it reveals). But I could also observe her reactions to my behavior and deliberate myself on what attitudes must be expressed by my behavior for her to react in such a way, or observe her behavior generally to deliberate on what attitudes she likely has towards me and what that implies for my own attitudes. Finally, deliberation can be performed collectively, so it is possible that we

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<sup>19</sup> What meaning the question has obviously depends crucially on the cultural context; e.g., I hope it is not unfair if I describe the three variations, in order of appearance, as a US-American, German, and Finnish 'How are you?'.

deliberate together on what to do, or even how to live, and what attitudes towards life that implies, and that will likely trigger me to critically thematize my own attitudes. Reflecting critically on life entails a conversation on how each of us experiences one's life and a joint deliberation on how to live it, be that together or each on their own; it requires a mutual intent for expressive disinterested reflection.

As I emphasized throughout this investigation, we can reflect with so many intentions, and the open-ended, disinterested concern to thoroughly thematize whatever attitudes I have (simply noticing or describing how I experience something) is a special case among them; and so is the corresponding mode in reflecting with others where I trigger the other to reflect in no particular way on whatever attitudes she happens to have, but there are many reasons why I would want to do that: I could want for her or me to achieve clarity about her concerns, for her to make up her mind on a certain proposition, for her to become aware of an attitude I believe she has but is unaware of, or for her to find that she really has this or that attitude that I wish her to have. Our concerns to reflect with others thus mirror our concerns to reflect privately, with the added complexity that reflecting with others involves the interplay of both parties' concerns. It is thus important to highlight that aiding a person's reflections, e.g. by triggering her to reflect disinterestedly, does not entail that I care about her, because different motivations are conceivable: an open-ended curiosity about who the person is that I care about; an open-ended curiosity about who people of a certain group or people in general are, without caring about the person in particular; an interested concern towards (the well-being of) a person I care about; and, of course, an interested concern about a person I do not care about or care about only instrumentally (e.g., it might be my professional responsibility to inquire into a person's concerns as part of a research objective). A scenario where I show a disinterested concern for the disinterested reflection of another person, as part of a conversation whose intent is merely for her to express about how she experiences her life, is therefore a special instance of a special case.

An interesting, and adjacent, question to ask is to what degree empathy is required for reflecting with others. If we understand empathy as the capacity of experiencing of how it must be like to be the other, we could, in the conceptual frame of this investigation, define it as voluntarily or

involuntarily invoking attitudes of a kind similar to the ones we believe the other to have (for instance, those invoked by an imagination of me being in the same, or a memory of me being in a similar situation). As any other attitude, empathetic attitudes thus constitute my relation to a thing in the world, in this case the other person, but in the special way that they relate me to the relation this person has to something else. It is thus what comes closest to an experience of reflecting on someone else's behalf (thematizing someone's attitudes as though they were my own). A deliberate empathetic experience is necessarily a reflective one, since my thematization of an attitude is what causes the attitude to exist. As any other affective attitudes, empathetic attitudes are significant relations to the matter at hand, for instance I could be alarmed by empathizing to navigate a situation without deliberating on it, though I could probably respond in the same way had I instead deliberated on the adequate response. The motivational inclinations of empathetic attitudes allow me to accomplish the same intuitively, and there may be cases where this is helpful to deliberate on a person's (even my own) unaware attitudes, for instance to guess a desire based on how we would experience a situation someone is in. These considerations make it plausible to say that empathy is helpful for our habitual practices of reflecting with others generally, though perhaps not strictly required in any specific case. But more can certainly be said on the matter.

It is also important to discern empathy from caring about the other, and here again I am not sure about the empirical interrelation. When I empathize with someone, I invoke attitudes and they have motivational force, so at first it makes sense to assume that an empathetic person will care about the other, but invoking someone's apparent attitudes does not require that I identify with them in anyway (especially since they are not my own). On the other hand, caring about the person entails that I affirm some relationship (instrumental or not) between us, but that does not strictly presuppose that I empathize with her. Then again, it is characteristic to and indicative of caring deeply and non-instrumentally about someone that I do make her concerns my own, not only in the sense of affirming the reasons they provide, but empathetically by suffering them as

though they were my own<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, expressing empathy is often the expected adequate response to a person's expressive reflections, because, if sincere, it reveals that we care about the other in at least some way. What is important is that it usually does not matter whether the person succeeds at empathizing (approximating and invoking the other's attitudes faithfully), what matters is what the attempt reveals about our concerns. Interestingly, if we suppose that people are aware of this and are thus concerned about whether the other attempts to empathize or not, it follows that, if they do care about someone, they will be motivated to empathize with her. Whether a person consistently attempts to empathize is therefore a reason whether to reflect (sincerely) with others or not.

Assuming that neither empathy nor caring about the other are strictly required for reflecting with others generally also makes plausible the caution that people usually exhibit when facing the prospect of reflecting with others. It is easy to see why expressing our reflections has major social implications if one takes into account that my reflective expressions affect the other who is a person that also lives and is capable of reflecting and deliberating on her life. Whenever I express my reflections, I potentially trigger the other to reflect, privately or expressively. In other words, our reflective expressions are potential triggers by nature. By expressing my reflections, I also make myself vulnerable to critical deliberation when the other questions the beliefs and intentions implied or expressed, or to judgement when she confronts them with her own. Expressing my reflections also reveals my concerns and thus introduces reasons to come to certain conclusions when deliberating; it therefore risks an altered behavior on the other's and my part that may have an impact on the way I, she, or we want to live our lives. My expressions also have a bearing upon the way the other reflects, because I may reveal attitudes towards her that will lead her to question her behavior and her aware or unaware attitudes – I may thus trigger her to reflect in a different, possibly more thorough and open-minded, possibly more obsessive and opinionated way. Whenever I express my reflections, I assert power over the other, and, since I can deliberate on whether to express my attitudes, feign, or conceal them, it is of course possible that I recognize

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<sup>20</sup> The prior is strictly required for caring, with respect to the latter I am not so sure. Empathy seems best described as a consequence, and therefore, epistemically, as an indication of concern.

and utilize this power by pretending and lying about my attitudes. This does not need to be rooted in a malicious or egoistic pursuit of my own concerns: for instance, a therapist may find herself unable to reflect in a disinterested, critical way or her attempts to do so may end on persistent, profound feelings of unhappiness, but she may lie about this to not upset her patient's eagerness to attempt reflecting in certain ways; being insincere when expressing my reflections can be rooted in an intention to aid the other in reflection, and is compatible with caring about her, even loving her. But it can of course amount to an attempt to manipulate the other. For all these reasons, our concerns about the prospect of reflecting in certain ways extend to each other's reflective expressions.

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Sometimes, what I care about when expressing a reflection is for the other to empathize with me faithfully – I then want for the other not to understand my reflections but to experience them as though they were her own. When facing complex attitudes such as moods towards my life, I then might find myself at a lack of words and resort to idiosyncratic forms of communicative behavior that can involve allegories, aesthetic expressions and other forms of evocative communication. So far, I focused my discussion on verbal communication, but the various attitudes involved in my reflections can of course be expressed in as many ways as our communicative behavior can be meaningfully organized. For instance, what some artworks reveal or try to reveal might best be described not as an isolated feeling, belief, or any other attitude, but as the experiential character of one's convoluted, highly particular reflections – as an evocatively expressive disinterested reflection on some context, possibly one's life. The perhaps strongest communicative devices we have when expressing reflections on one's life, are stories. A good way to explain this in the words of this investigation is to say that stories can create coherent combinations of factual accounts of a person's life with conceptions of how (best) to live and idiosyncratic forms of expression that evoke how a person has reflected on her life. Narratives are a form of expression that arranges events within an explicit thematic and temporal context, they thus offer themselves, if the events thematized are the endeavors to pursue what one cares about, as conceptual vehicles for reflecting expressively on one's life (the temporal context from birth to death) and thus for the description

of personal identity itself (MacIntyre, 2007:205; Zahavi, 2005:107). The idea in the latter case is that one's life is established as a context only by arranging one's behavior in a life conception of narrative form that answers the question how to live (MacIntyre, 2007:218). I cannot discuss the idea that a proclaimed narrative form of life is fundamental for personal identity with the rigor it deserves<sup>21</sup>, but, if what is meant with personal identity is one's 1st-person perspective, it most certainly puts things upside down (Zahavi, 2005:112). This should be intuitive since any given narrative is the result of complex deliberative, and potentially reflective, thematizations: to make sense of something I need to relate to it experientially, and for that I need, as we saw, to be able to discern it from a universe of things, which requires that I relate it to my spatiotemporal presence – so a narrative cannot be the precondition to have an awareness of the latter (Zahavi, 2005:112). Narratives do not even have to be expressive of reflective self-awareness: I can provide a narrative of my life without reflecting on it by simply telling the stories that others have to tell about me<sup>22</sup>. Narratives are nonetheless outcomes of possible reflections and precisely because they fail to exhaust the whole context of one's life, they spark reflections that can result in contrasting narratives. Stories can console us because they suggest a degree of coherence, clarity, and definitiveness that we rarely experience in reflection.

Let me suggest a notion of personal identity, different from the one above, that perhaps also makes the narrative thesis more plausible (or at least why one would come to believe it): When I deliberate on how to live that entails that I affirm or reject possible things to care about. For that it is not only instrumental that I make sense of my total past behavior (insofar as it reveals what I care about), it is also likely that I care about what that reveals about my life conception to others, what it has to say about the person I am. One way of deliberating on how to live is thus to deliberate on as what kind of person I want to be experienced by others, and one way to do that is to refer to the stories they have to tell about me, or that I myself as an observer from 3rd-person perspective would have to tell about me. I think it is at least not unreasonable to suggest that what I experience as my personal identity is rooted in the identification with such anonymous

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<sup>21</sup> See Zahavi (2005) for a detailed critique of this idea.

<sup>22</sup> Most notably, I can tell it unreflectively by relying on the descriptions provided by my roles, see below.



thematizations of my life, and this can of course become a great concern to me (not least because it greatly impacts how others behave towards me and thus how cooperative they are when I rely on them for the accomplishment of my concerns). For similar reasons I generally care about the expressions of my reflections, because what they reveal is how I experience my life and that is sometimes more important for the understanding others have of my identity than how I lived otherwise. When I express the outcomes of my sincere reflections on my life, I thus likely desire for them to faithfully make accessible the richness of what it is like for me to live, and this desire can set me up for experiences of belonging and alienation (Zahavi, 2005:95). One crucial reason is that when we express our reflections, we always rely on a given vocabulary available to all conversation partners that is culturally contingent and evolving (not least through our reflective assaults on it) and that we never have a full grasp on, and so does no one else. We therefore never share the descriptive repertoire to express our reflections in just the same way (which also poses a challenge for this investigation itself, or why it might be helpful); we all have our personal ways of articulating our respective life conceptions (Rorty, 1989:73). Expressing one's reflections sincerely is thus challenged, not only by what the other cares about (or not), but also about how they potentially deliberate on the ways available for us to articulate our reflections: I can be anxious to reflect on my life, not only because it potentially devalues what I care about and live for, but also because it can sever the way I make sense of myself (Rorty, 1989:89). Perhaps against this backdrop, it is plausible that I can have a desire to indulge in and enhance the idiosyncratic forms of expressing my reflections, or perhaps even for these to become 'iconic' in the sense of being acknowledged as part of some canon of expressions conventional to a culture, thus shaping the terms on which I and others therein define our personal identities (Rorty, 1989:143). I then care about expressing my reflections in some particularly accomplished way and to the degree that I identify with this concern in some manner (I might desire to *be* good at this or to *seem* good at it [Tugendhat, 2003:76]), I will thematize this desire when reflecting on my life, e.g. as manifest in feelings of self-worth<sup>23</sup>. A reflective life could thus be seen as one that makes *the expression of*

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<sup>23</sup> Reflections which I can express again by writing a book a writer plagued by self-doubts about his writing, or painting a self-portrait, and so on.

*reflections on life its final end.* The proto-typical role for such a life conception is probably that of the artist: Artists, described admittedly rather broadly, produce things (artifacts, events, and so on) that express their reflections on life, or that trigger the consumer of their works to reflect in certain ways. Consequently, we expect someone assuming this role to be good at this, for instance I say that an artwork (a novel, a symphony, a painting, etc.) is good when it triggers a somehow significant reflection, when the artwork is such that I cannot but thematize my attitudes towards it, possibly (if it is really good) in the context of my life. And we do in fact think of good artists as highly reflective persons, perhaps in particular of good authors (bearing testimony to the narrative thesis). What we have here (assuming a person sincerely cares about articulating her reflections as an answer to the question what to live for, and not just instrumentally) is a life conception centered in the form of disinterested expressive reflection. And while that is not necessarily a critically reflective life, it certainly warrants the term of a reflective life in that it is sustained by a systematic and deliberate effort to thematize one's attitudes towards it. So far, so good. But most people do not live in that way, yet we probably want to say that there are reflective persons who do not. Then there must be a way to live a reflective life that does not make the expression of reflection its final end!

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We saw already in the previous section some of the inclinations a person has *not* to reflect on her life or to reflect uncritically, but this picture is incomplete, not only because it fails to address all possible inclinations, but also because it fails to explain how it is possible for me to live my life without reflecting on it. If reflection is necessary to make up my mind on things generally, how can I function without it? Let us look at a case where we do *not* expect a person to reflect. Suppose I asked a person who just disposed of some piece of trash why she threw it into the bin, or a person who stopped in front of a red traffic light why she stopped. It would be a surprise if the person reacted by starting to thematize her feelings and desires towards bins and traffic lights, rather than looking at me in confusion and saying 'Well, that's how one does it. What's wrong with you?'. That is because in some cases it would be highly counterintuitive to reflect on an action, and that is when a person complies with benign, instrumental norms – those contingent agreements that

govern the practicalities of everyday life organization. Norms relieve me of the task to reflect and deliberate on my behavior, and the sets of norms that offer integral parts of possible life conceptions in the form of social roles relieve me from the task of reflecting critically on my life (see Tugendhat, 1979:227). The role of the artist is in that regard a rather exceptional professional role. Insofar as roles govern my behavior with others, they define what person I am to them, but whether and how I identify with the role as defining my life conception depends on me (Tugendhat, 1979:270). What matters primarily for this investigation is this: Insofar as roles govern my behavior, they *entitle and commit me to ways of reflecting and deliberating with others*. For instance, entering into a loving relationship both entitles and commits me to not only share my deliberations on what I think would be best to do with my life, but, perhaps more importantly, to expressively reflect on my life by thematizing how I feel and what I desire about it. Conversely, the role entitles me to provoke the other to reflect and be aided by her in my reflections, and they commit me to aid her in hers and be receptive to her attempts to trigger me to reflect (in particular about those things that pertain to the norms and agreements that constitute our relationship and any attitudes either of us has towards the relationship as a whole).

Thus, I can ask for each role that I have or could have or must have what reflective practices it entitles or commits me to. Since roles also govern behavior other than reflection and deliberation, we cannot identify roles in this way, but perhaps we can categorize them. For instance, whereas intimate personal relationships usually entail a general entitlement and commitment to reflect on the relationship (that's what makes them intimate), this must not be the case for a professional relationship. It is intuitive that the reflective entitlements and commitments would rise with the degree to which the relationship is based on a non-instrumental, voluntary commitment: I want my friends and partner to reflect on our respective relationships because I want them to be as certain as possible that they really want to engage in this relationship; I want them to thoroughly make up their mind. I do not have the same expectations towards a colleague or employee or administrative official because I accept that our relationship is the contingent result of our

respective pursuit of concerns that render the relationship instrumental.<sup>24</sup> But there are of course professional roles that defy this (rather bland) categorization! The artist is one, as we saw, and we could add a large array of roles involving social and psychological research and development in a broad sense (teachers, community workers, ethnographers, journalists, and so on). For instance, the role of the therapist entails a commitment to trigger other people to reflect in certain, possibly disinterested and critical, ways through dedicated forms of behavior, such as conversation or structured exercises. Be that as it may, the degree to which we let each other be mutually aided (or obstructed) in reflecting on our respective lives is crucial in determining how intimate our relationship is, and therefore for defining our roles in the first place (intimacy can always fall behind or exceed of what we understand to be entailed by our roles), and it gives rise to incorporating the other as a concern when reflecting on my life – possibly so much that I love the other, and if this is mutual, it is natural that we jointly deliberate on our lives, that we stop asking (only) the question ‘how do I want to live?’ but rather ‘how do we want to live?’.

The totality of norms and roles affirmed in the behavior of a community, form a factual collective answer on how to live, i.e. what kind of society to be. Through them, or rather through how I perceive them in my attitudes, I am confronted with a compound set of expectations and entitlements on how to behave, depending on by what roles and norms my behavior can be described and evaluated (Tugendhat, 1979:269), and that entails to reflect and deliberate or not. How exactly I perceive this is of course subject to a messy and convoluted continuous loop of reflection and deliberation, alone or with others, as well as consequential or inconsequential behavior on our respective parts. I have no ambition of untangling this mess and, for that matter, no ambition to exhaustively describe the phenomena of norms and roles, even in their mere implications on practices of reflection and deliberation – what counts here is that an individual can for every form of behavior refer to and rely on an inclination based on a perceived expectation

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<sup>24</sup> Kinships are an interesting case. In relationships we engage in voluntarily, we reflect with others (thematize our concerns at large) before we deliberate jointly (accept their concerns as ours and incorporate them in decisions we make together), but in kinships this order is reversed: I am expected to deliberate collectively with my family members (children cannot do that so parents are expected to deliberate on their behalf) as a matter of my role, and only because of that I am also expected to reflect with them (but depending on the culture perhaps only in the limited way to make my deliberations understood, especially those on behalf of others).

or recommendation of ‘how one behaves’ (Heidegger, 2006:126). Insofar as such considerations are necessarily anonymous 3rd-personal deliberations that are deeply tied to one’s perception of personal identities, we could perhaps speak of a community’s cultural identity, but these are ambiguous terms so I am not sure if they are of help here, and I will mostly try to stay with a descriptive account of the phenomena. What matters is that these inclinations provide me with reasons to behave in certain ways that allow me to circumvent a critical reflection on my actual concerns, and thus allow me to live unreflectively (Heidegger, 2006:129; Tugendhat, 1979:278).

I thus have to choose in particular social contexts or the holistic context of my life whether I want to reflect on my attitudes towards these tacit or outspoken rules and deliberate on the question to what degree I should confirm to them or refuse them, or whether I want to do neither and simply go by them in an unreflective and uncritical manner, and only deliberate on them as far as is needed instrumentally to comply with them. On the other hand, assuming a role or complying with a norm can of course be, and to the degree that I acknowledge them as answers to the question how to live, often is, a consequence of reflecting on my life. The reflective entitlements and commitments inherent to a role can provide me with reasons to assume or refuse the role (if I am entitled to do that under my general social circumstances). Assuming and refusing roles, complying with or leaning up against norms is a consequence of how I want to live, including in what way I want to engage in practices of reflecting with others (Tugendhat, 1979:278). The tacit expectations of roles can always be subject to reflection and deliberation and if these extend to legitimate practices and conversations, they redefine the role or give rise to new roles (see Tugendhat, 1979:279). We thus find here, in a more complex, since intersubjective way, the same dynamics between reflection, deliberation, and behavior as we did when discussing the phenomenon of reflecting on one’s life. The investigation becomes complex here (if it is not already), so I will discuss them only as far as I think is necessary for a definition of the phrase ‘living a reflective life’.

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Roles play a role<sup>25</sup> on all the levels I addressed above, because they equip me with the opportunities, instructions, and capabilities enabling me to engage in practices that form my concrete answer to the question how I want to live, and because they entitle and commit me to the forms of communicative practices that are necessary to thoroughly reflect on my life, and to deliberate on how I want to live for myself and for or with others (see Tugendhat, 1979:274). To what degree I can thoroughly reflect on my life, deliberate on what to do with it, and express these efforts in the way I ultimately behave is a matter of how open the cooperative practices I engage in are for consequential reflection and deliberation, and the entitlement and commitment to sustain these practices is largely a question of what roles I have assumed by choice or contingency. This is due to the social dimension of reflection, due to the fact that it usually entails a mediation between immediate and mediate awareness of my own attitudes, and therefore requires a bedrock of communicative practices that allows for the mutual reflection of what our shared behavior reveals about our respective relations to ourselves, others, and all other things in the world.<sup>26</sup> Making up my mind on how to live therefore entails that I assume a stance towards the roles I have and the roles I could possibly have and what that implies for my answer to the question what person I want to be (Tugendhat, 1979:269f.). Conversely, any choice on how I want to live necessarily answers how I want to engage in opportunities of social practices, including how I want to reflect and deliberate with others, and thus how and whether I want to assume or refuse possible roles that establish different relationships between us. Discussing the social dimension of reflection has led us to a number of considerations that certainly introduce a new conceptual level to the investigation, but it is important to note that these merely spell out the consequences of my earlier elaborations about reflecting on one's life. My concerns bind me to the world at large, so any stance on what they are to be, on who I want to be, is, at the same time, a stance on what kind of

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<sup>25</sup> Sorry.

<sup>26</sup> I think it is important to caution here against a radical interpretation of the idea that reflection entails mediations between 1st- and 3rd-person perspective and is therefore an inherently social activity, one that blatantly maintains that all forms of reflection are communicative in nature and that reflection is a strictly social endeavor. We have to appreciate the complexities that result from the privative and intersubjective facets of our ways of thematizing one's own attitudes, and a meaningful discussion of the phenomena is not helped by eliminating these complexities by an exclusive emphasis on any notion.

world I wish for; any life conception to govern how I want to become involved in my present opportunities is a vision of some shared future (MacIntyre, 2007:215).

Suppose I deliberate on my life and dissent with the commitments and entitlements constituted by the roles and norms affecting me currently. I could then reflect and deliberate on what I want to do with my life and consequentially adopt different roles. So, let us further suppose that this is not possible (because there are no roles that meet my concerns, because I am not free to assume them, or for whatever other reason). I could assume different stances towards my social environment in such a situation, but they broadly fall into the categories of those defined by an affirmation of my concerns (and a rejection of social norms) on one hand and those defined by an affirmation of social norms (and a rejection of my concerns) on the other (Tugendhat, 1979:278). Each can manifest in different reactions. In the latter case, the notable alternatives are to reflect in regulative ways (in particular with others) in the hope to change my mind thus resolving the conflict and to ‘suck it up’ by ignoring my concerns (by not reflecting on them, or reflecting on them inconsequentially) and behave in compliance to normative demands. In the prior case, the alternatives are, firstly, to ignore the expectations of others and follow my concerns regardless or, if that’s not possible to deliberate on their behalf and solicit their approval (or force it), and, secondly, to attempt resolving the conflict by triggering them to reflect and deliberate with them. If enough people join this deliberation and behave accordingly, the roles and norms in question are redefined or replaced. In the assertion of one’s concerns in the confrontation of societal norms and everyone else’s we find a case for potential critical reflection on my life with others, an instance of expressively making up my mind on how to live and on the world wherein I partake in the life of others (Tugendhat, 1979:280). Critically reflecting with others is therefore a source of social change, of *innovation* in the widest sense (Tugendhat, 1979:278).

In a community of free individuals, critical deliberation and disinterested reflection mutually *presuppose* each other. To engage in social practices, I need the cooperation of others. To get their cooperation, I need to engage in shared deliberation (unless I am fine with forcing or manipulating them). To rely on the outcome of that, I need them to make up their minds, and that entails that they reflect on the matter at hand. Because no one can reflect exhaustively on

one's life alone, I need to be open to engage in reflecting with them. And because all particular deliberations and reflections hinge on the overarching context of one's life, I need to be open to reflecting on life with them. Because others are in the same fundamental situation as I am, they also need to engage in such an attempt (unless they are fine with forcing or manipulating me). And the other way round: If I have an interest to engage in thorough reflection on my life and live in a way that expresses these reflections as good as possible, I have to engage in reflections with others. If I want to sustain my reflective practices, I need to open myself to the question to what extent they qualify as or are compatible with an answer to the question of how to live for me and the other. If I want this answer to be reliable, I need to engage in shared critical deliberation on the good life. The two ideas can also naturally *lead to* each other, as we saw: We engage in cooperative activities and we can talk about how to do that. This can escalate to the question how to live which can lead to the question how it is like to live for us. And from reflection to deliberation: I experience the world through my attitudes and I can express them and that can extend to the attitudes I have towards my life as a whole, which can provoke the question how to live, and how we should engage in cooperative practices on that basis. To express this interrelation a bit pointedly: There is no (fully) reflective life without a critical life, and no (fully) critical life without a reflective life.

We therewith have what we need for a descriptive account of this investigation's theme: Living a reflective life means to foster and engage in practices of critically reflecting on life with others, that means in expressive disinterested thematizations of my various attitudes towards the holistic context of all my attitudes and of others' attitudes towards their lives; and to foster and sustain these practices I need to engage in collective critical deliberation on life to assess and negotiate to what degree these reflective practices are compatible with or constitutive of our joint answer to the question of how to live as a community (see Tugendhat, 1979:282). It means living a life that is open to and sustained by a continuous conversation on how it is like to live for each of us and on how we could or should live, individually and together. It is a life in which my behavior at large is pursuant of and coherent with a concern about my own and others' disinterested reflections and critical deliberations on life. And we can see how the notion of a reflective life I discussed with



respect to the role of the artist, if fully spelled out, falls into this, if we make ourselves aware that to live a life to express one's disinterested reflection requires the approval of others, and if this is what I truly care about, in a community of free individuals this entails that I will be eager to become active and critically deliberate on how such a life conception can be socially sustained.

Living a reflective life does not have to be what I ultimately care about. I *can* live a reflective life because it is an end in itself for me, because I regard it as a good life in itself. But I can also do so because I think it is instrumental in determining what the good life is for me, or because I think it is compatible with what I understand to be the good life for me (perhaps because it does not matter in this regard).<sup>27</sup> We also have to appreciate the fact that a concern to live a reflective life is not a life conception since it does not provide me with a sufficient answer on how exactly to live. But it does provide me with a *criterium* for any possible life conception; a life conception that I can, to the extent that it relies on social practices, never completely adhere to and fulfill on my own. Living a reflective life is a *social ideal*. As soon as I articulate a concern for it, I am in a possible conversation about the good life. We can thus ask whether we should aspire to it or not, and if I want to make up my mind on how to live, I will somehow have to form a stance towards it. And if I do that explicitly and generally with others, I will have to raise the question: Should we live a reflective life?

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<sup>27</sup> Imagining, apart from this, that the practices that constitute a reflective life can advance to norms that I am forced or incentivized to participate in, I can of course pretend to live a reflective life but I cannot be forced to really live one, because I cannot be forced to sincerely reflect critically on my life.

## 5. REFLECTIVE LIFE AS A SOCIAL IDEAL

Let me recap, in broad strokes, what I have done in the previous chapter. I have addressed what I called the conceptual problem of reflection by developing a broad definition of the activity of reflection that explains how advocates of more narrow definitions come to think of reflection as a discursive activity with epistemic and normative merits – as an activity that a person engages in when trying to make sense of her life and make up her mind on what to do with it – but that also locates these distinguished forms of thematizing one’s attitudes within a larger spectrum of manifestations of the phenomenon that are less systematic and rely on divergent motivations. I have broadly discussed the motivational disposition to engage in these different ways to thematize how one experiences the world and outlined how these dispositions center in the attitudes a person has towards her life as a whole, and that critically evaluating her various beliefs and desires is thus intimately tied to how she confronts herself with her living experience as a whole; how she reflects on her life. Concomitantly, I introduced a number of perspectives on the social dimension of reflection, most importantly that it is a deliberate activity that we can sometimes only perform thoroughly if we engage in it expressively in conversation with others – and to what extent a person is motivated to do this depends on how her life conception inclines her to engage in social behavior, including practices of reflecting with others. All these considerations culminated in a meta-conception about ways to live one’s life that rely on a conversation with the social other and that can thus be actualized not by the individual alone but require a community’s cooperation.

Specifically, I concluded the previous chapter with the suggestion that living a reflective life means to live a life that is open to and sustained by a critically reflective conversation about the good life. Insofar as the notion of living a reflective life provides us with criteria to evaluate different possible conceptions of how to live collectively, I described it as a social ideal. For any ideal we can of course ask whether it is a good one: we can deliberate on whether we should affirm or reject it. Thus, the subsequent (and no longer descriptive, but normative!) suggestion that offers itself for discussion is the notion that a reflective life is a good life, or even stronger: that the good life is necessarily a reflective life (see MacIntyre, 2007:219). This is a loaded question, to put it mildly, and I have no

ambition to present an answer here, nor suggest that it is possible to do so definitively. But since it accounts for the intent and motivational dynamics internal to the activity of critically reflecting on life, the question is tied to what I referred to as the normative problem of reflection; the question if critical reflection is an activity that we can generally hold to have normative merit, and this is what I want to address in this chapter.

Even then, some further restrictions are necessary. Most importantly the conception of a reflective life I advanced here is a two-sided one in that it means to live a life that is both *open to* and *sustained by* a critically reflective conversation on life. While the former demands to sustain a conversation that meets the criteria put forward by the account developed in the previous chapter, the latter demands that the entirety of practices that constitute life in a given community, including the norms and institutions to govern them, are continuously evaluated and augmented with respect to their ultimate concerns or purposes, as determined by such conversation. What the social ideal of a reflective life then ultimately aims for is ‘worldbuilding’: the fully realized capacity of a community to create its lifeworld in a way that is pursuant of what this community holds to be the good life, as determined by a fully realized public critically reflective conversation on life – the ideal of a democratic culture, if you will, understood as the collective self-determination of a community. Ultimately, we are looking here at a thematization of the entire socio-cultural environment of a given community. This is far too large an undertaking to be pursued as part of the remaining investigation. There is also a plausible argument that we would find it impossible to affirm or reject any social ideal without having a clear understanding of what it implies for our concrete social life (MacIntyre, 2007:23). I agree with this, and, regardless, it seems to me that concretizing a concept is required or at least helpful to complete a sound descriptive account, as it forces to demonstrate and test it by exemplifying what it does and does not entail. Consequently, what would be required here is an extended effort of exemplifying what the social ideal of a reflective life implies for different practices, alongside a theoretical description of such practices, in particular the conversational practices to determine their respective ends, and an account of how they sit in life and what determines their success and possibility in a given community. Confronting a social ideal with real and possible life situations and developing it further on that

basis is an infinite task, one that can only be properly approached by a community, and thus one I cannot approach here. I will therefore largely ignore the question of what it would mean for certain practices or the life of a community to be *sustained by* a critically reflective conversation on life. This renders my thematization of the social ideal of a reflective life incomplete to a certain degree, hence why I gave this work the title of a thought experiment.

What I will thematize, if only tentatively, is the former half of the concept – what it would mean to be *open to* a critically reflective conversation on life, because this question is deeply tied to the normative problem of reflection; the question what would be the reasons to say that we ought to engage in critical reflection, providing a community with a reason to encourage its members to do so (expressively). Specifically, I will give a brief account of the normative problem intrinsic to a critically reflective conversation on life – a problem that, so it seems to me, those scholars concerned with the ‘critical’ facets of reflection tend to circumvent in their discussions of the phenomenon. Now, the suggestions asserted here are such that we can safely describe them as uncommon in the literature on professional practice and organizational life. From the perspective of this investigation, this is not merely accidental, but can, at least in parts, be explained by a thematization of the phenomenon of reflection. The earlier suggestions on the motivational dynamics of reflecting on life provide a starting point here, but they are largely detached from the dominant conversations on organizational life. Therefore, I will, in the second section, discuss how the prospect of a critically reflective conversation on life presents itself in the institutional contexts of professional practice and provide some suggestions on why the normative problem is, as such, not adequately recognized and addressed in theoretical discourse and professional practice. I will round out this discussion by asking what it would mean for professional practice to be open to a critically reflective conversation on life and entertain some very tentative thoughts on how this could become relevant in the life of the individual professional.

## **5.1. REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION AND THE NORMATIVE PROBLEM**

In the second chapter we encountered a problem of circularity, and over the course of the investigation we came to specify that further. Let me, on that basis, begin this section with an

attempt to phrase this major challenge we face when talking about the normative problem of reflection in the terminology of this investigation: the activity of critical deliberation on how to live is such that it needs to employ its own criteria, but those might be impossibly given anonymously, i.e. detached from my contingent attitudes, not all of which I am thematically aware of. Therefore, to establish the criteria I require to evaluate possible life conceptions, I need to engage in reflective conversation on how it is like to live and on how I should live. The degree to which certain forms of reflection themselves can be expected to hold normative merits again depends on how their respective reflective intents and outcomes are evaluated as per the outcome of such a conversation, rendering general evaluations of the activity of reflection, in its different forms, contingent upon its very realization.

It is the last sentence which presents us with a problem when addressing the question to what degree we can say that the activity of critical reflection has normative merits, and this also determines how we should answer the question whether a community should be *open to* a reflective conversation on life. But the paragraph above also describes how this problem is tied to the question for the good life, which determines how we should answer the question whether the life of a community should be *sustained by* such a conversation, which I do not want to discuss in its own right, though it will continue to force itself back into the picture. One important remark is necessary: for brevity's sake, I speak of the normative problem of reflection, but what I will address here is only the particular case of critical reflection. As should have become clear from the previous chapter, we could ask the same question for any other mode of reflection, and, as we saw, the particular mode of critical reflection requires the individual to actualize several of these (regulative reflection to 'step back', disinterested reflection on whatever my attitudes happen to be) alongside the capacity of critical deliberation. Having said that, most positions do focus on critical reflection in this context (if only because they do not distinguish between reflection and deliberation).

What sort of responses are conceivable to the normative problem of reflection? First of all, one would have to separate between those responses that acknowledge the problem and those that do not. The first group can again be distinguished by their respective answer to the problem, while

the second group comprises both those responses that deny the problem (because they maintain that critical reflection is unquestionably of normative merit, or not) and those that ignore it (though, if the account I developed is accurate, they would still need to address the problem implicitly)<sup>28</sup>. Responses from the second group obviously make for less interesting conversation partners when trying to talk about the problem specifically, so that the discussion I want to entertain in this chapter will mostly involve authors who do acknowledge the problem on some level. So much for a quick schematic classification of ways to respond to the problem. Concrete responses can of course be mounted on a broad range of intellectual vehicles, but, the *de facto* response to the normative problem of reflection as well as to the question for the good life is often embedded within an anthropological conception, a certain notion of humanity. This is most apparent for those responses that advocate some version of the claim that a critically reflective life is a properly human life, thus equating the social ideal of a reflective life with an anthropological conception (as would I, were I to present the account developed in the previous chapter as a theory of the human being, rather than a thought experiment on some phenomena central to the foundation of practices in human life). But it is important to note that this sort of response is not only present within those positions that deny the problem on the grounds of an affirmation of the normative merits of critical reflection, but also within those that ignore the problem. The culturally most impactful variant of this is the conception of the *rational agent* or *homo economicus* (see Bénabou & Tirole, 2003; Lee et al., 2009; Thaler, 2000), an anthropological conception that has no need for critical reflection on life because a perfect understanding of its own hierarchy of preferences (concerns reduced to their impress on deliberation) is essential to it. I will say more about what consequences the adoption of such a conception might imply for the prospects of a critically reflective conversation within organizational life in the next chapter, but

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<sup>28</sup> These sorts of answers are often coupled with avowals of ontological standpoints (critical realism, relativism, foundationalism, and positivism, though each of them offer justification not to have the conversation, since from positivist and relativistic perspectives there is no successful conversation to have, while from a foundationalist perspective the need for conversation can be alleviated, or the conversation anyways needs not be reflective). Or this anyways is a point at which an ontological discussion could become constructive.

for now I want to remain with conceptions of the sort that I had in mind when thinking to substantiate the idea of ‘meaningful reflection’ with that of an ‘authentic life’.

Conceptions of this sort are effectively in pursuit of ‘the discovery of the universal conditions of human existence [... which] would give us a goal, the only possible goal, namely the full recognition of that very necessity, the self-consciousness of our essence’ (Rorty, 1989:26). Critical reflection would then consist of a familiarization with the general characteristics of our human nature which would lead us to recognize shortcomings in our ‘internal moral compass’ (Fortin & Fellenz, 2008) and supply us with the ability and motivation to recalibrate it, as part of the actualization of one’s authentic humanity. The consequence would be the denial of contingency as a feature of the human condition and its reduction to a problem of external factors, and the identification of general criteria for the activity of critically reflecting on one’s life. This is precisely the claim whose rejection makes up the core of Rorty (1989), which is why I want to discuss it here as one conceptualization of the normative problem of reflection and its consequences.

The central idea to carry Rorty’s position is that there is nothing in experience that enables one to establish neutral criteria for the evaluation of the vocabulary to articulate one’s life conception or any anthropological conception that are not contingent on the prior affirmation of a given vocabulary: ‘we can only compare languages or metaphors with each other, not with something beyond language called “fact”’ (Rorty, 1989:20). Thus, the possibility of any objective anthropological conception is denied (Rorty, 1989:109) and the general normative merit of reflection questioned: ‘words like “kindness” or “decency” or “dignity” – do not form a vocabulary which all human beings can reach by reflection on their natures. Such reflection will not produce anything except a heightened awareness of the possibility of suffering. It will not produce a *reason to care* about suffering.’ (Rorty, 1989:93) The central hope inherent to the equation of human nature with a moral vision here is to unite an individual’s eudemonic rationale (her *true* concerns, we could say) with the interests of a political community; if it is given up, the normative ends of individual and communal life have to be seen as incommensurable (Rorty, 1989:XIII, 120). Much rather than, we should see these spheres of life as conflicting, as being caught up in ‘the tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of

contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency' (Rorty, 1989:25). What's more, the individual's hope to see her personal moral fantasies fulfilled in the life of the community may make her blind to and counteract the community's actual concerns, so that moral visions built upon a certain notion of humanity come with their very own source of cruelty (Rorty, 1989:141). The thought that the life of a community could be sustained by a firm life conception is therefore a rather dangerous one, so that it is in the interest of the community to refrain from the search for an objectively legitimate conception (Rorty, 1989:52). If there is an idea of genuine fulfillment conceivable in human life, it does not rest in the realization of such a conception, but instead in the never-complete and self-referential articulation of a narrative account of life (Rorty, 1989:29,41).

On that basis, Rorty's vision of the good life maintains two separate spheres of private and public life, where the ideals of the private sphere are concerned more intimately with the idiosyncratic effort to cope with the contingent situation of one's life through (aesthetic) articulation of one's self-understanding (Rorty, 1989:27,103)<sup>29</sup>. The ideal for the public sphere, on the other hand, is one of human solidarity, 'the ability to see more and more traditional differences [...] as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation' (Rorty, 1989:102), chosen as a social goal worthy in its own right, rather than demanded by a foundational theory of the human being (Rorty, 1989:XVI). The normative discourse it is placed in should thus be thought of as one in which a so constituted community evaluates what sort of forms of self-understanding and possible concerns and future visions it can identify with (Rorty, 1989:60).

What do Rorty's warnings imply for our discussion? One might think that Rorty's position poses a threat for the very project of advocating for any social ideal (plunging us into relativistic fatalism), but this is not so. In our specific case, it is important to note that Rorty's rejection of a community sustained by a life conception founded in an anthropological conception held as objectively true

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<sup>29</sup> It would be interesting to discuss these ideas in comparison with what I said about the role of the artist in the previous chapter and the ideal of a reflective life founded in disinterested reflection, but that would lead us away from the goals of this chapter.



does not amount to a categorical rejection of the idea that a community could be sustained by a critical conversation on possible life conceptions. If conceded, it only means we cannot assert that such a conversation is something that human beings *qua* their nature ought to engage in, but it might still be warranted for them to do so. In fact, the effort central to Rorty's book – the effort of developing the vision of a 'post-metaphysical liberal utopia' split into the spheres of private and public and in pursuit of a gradual affirmation of solidarity for the sake of an elimination of cruelty – can serve as just one such example of advocating for a social ideal (the kind of communal life Rorty wishes for, based on what he finds himself to care about upon critical examination) within a conversation on life; one, Rorty is aware, in need of shared deliberation of the kind that entails questioning the vocabulary used to articulate the ideal (Rorty, 1989:176). And to demonstrate that this compatibility is more than just a methodical but also a thematic one, let me refer back to Tugendhat's position, which I have relied on extensively in the development of my account.

One thematic link between the two positions lies in their treatment of contingency as a fundamental challenge to human life. This anthropological premise is affirmed explicitly in Rorty when he asserts such things as: 'faced with the nonhuman, the nonlinguistic, we no longer have an ability to overcome contingency and pain by appropriation and transformation, but only the ability to *recognize* contingency and pain.' (1989:40) Tugendhat likewise puts contingency at the center of his anthropological conception (he adds death and impermanence to it, as Rorty does humiliation and pain), and distinguishes between two fundamental responses: a wishful conception that alleviates the struggles of existential challenges and a modification of one's fundamental concerns that acknowledges them (Tugendhat, 2003:121). With his preference of the latter over the prior he assumes a position that is somewhat contrary to Rorty's; whereas for Rorty the advancement towards a social ideal goes through the redescription of a community's self-understanding, Tugendhat advocates for shared critical deliberation on the good life, both individually and collectively (Tugendhat, 1979:356). Contrasting Rorty's emphasis of the contingency of human self-understanding, such deliberation on life will, as it necessarily confronts one with the existential challenges central to human life, be at least thematically generalizable (Tugendhat, 2003:97). This line of thinking provokes some further inquiries. For

instance, Rorty maintains that reflection does not follow objective criteria, but at least we could ask the question what kind of reflection he himself must have engaged in – how he must have thematized his own thoughts, feelings, desires, and so on – to come up with the material for his book, and if it would not be better for a community to educate its members in a way required to engage in this or other kinds of reflection, not least because they might otherwise find it impossible to affirm or reject the social ideal Rorty maintains would be in their interests. And then we could ask ourselves if the sort of culture required to critically discuss Rorty's suggestions can arise within a community that has adopted his ideal of a liberal utopia. And so on.

I do not know how such a conversation would go, but what matters to me here is that it should be possible. And that's all I want to do here – to show, firstly, that acknowledging the normative problem of reflection does not place one between a rock and a hard place (a dilemma of having to choose between relativistic paralysis and foundationalist dogmatism), i.e., that it does not lead into an internal contradiction making critically reflective conversation on the good life impossible, and, secondly, how a response to the normative problem of reflection and therewith an affirmation of the social ideal of a reflective life (as far as the 'open to'-part is concerned) could look like. The central idea is this: If we were to decide whether to affirm or reject Rorty's ideal of a liberal utopia vis-à-vis the ideal of a reflective life, we would – as long as we were concerned for our decision to best serve our respective concerns – have to engage in a critically reflective conversation on life (Tugendhat, 1979:356). We would then hold the social ideal of a reflective life to be normatively warranted because it enables us to identify agreements and conflicts among our best articulations of what each of us ultimately cares about. This would warrant the claim that our shared social life should be *open to* a critically reflective conversation, and the extended claim that it should also be *sustained by* such a conversation would entail that we accept such conversation as the ultimate source of legitimacy on how these concerns are enforced and restricted within our community (e.g., to refer back to Rorty, on the grounds that a critically reflective conversation presents us with a conflict resolution mechanism that avoids the cruelty posed by an adversarial assertion of personal concerns). In other words: As long as we want to avoid answering the question for a shared life conception authoritatively, we would have to do so

within a critically reflective conversation on life. The corresponding normative claim is that there can be no good life in a society whose members are not free to ask the question for the good life (Tugendhat, 1979:43). And as a result of the account developed in the previous chapter, we may concretize that by adding: a society whose members have the freedom to reflect expressively on their lives, i.e., a society in which they are entitled to thematize not only what anonymous conceptions they have of the good life but also, as a necessary prerequisite, whatever thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears they have pertaining the context of their life, including in particular the social practices wherein they pursue whatever it is that they care about.

On that basis, the answer to the normative problem of reflection would be the following: The normative merit of reflection lies in the very limited but no less important function of making free normative conversation possible (Tugendhat, 1979:48,240), rather than in identifying and realizing sources of normative legitimacy transcending such conversation. This means that our normative expectations towards the activity of questioning one's various attitudes are ill-founded if we expect it to reliably produce a certain moral stance; critical reflection does not necessitate the identification with any particular attitudes (qualified as normatively justified on the basis of some anthropological conception), it only makes their thematization possible to the end of (re-)evaluating how to identify with them, i.e. asking the question which of them to affirm and which (consequently) to reject.

This conclusion also suggests that the circularities that complicate the normative problem of reflection become problematic as such on the basis of a certain expectation: The expectation that critical reflection will produce an awareness of and identification with such a thing as a set of transcendent moral principles. This expectation is all but plausible, the intent of critically reflecting on life being the search for a suitable life conception. But if it happens to be the unquestioned expectation towards the prospect of engaging in certain forms of reflection or what informs a person's beliefs about reflection and reflexivity, a certain kind of frustration is inevitable, and any attempt to have a critically reflective conversation will face serious obstacles.

## 5.2. REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION AND INSTITUTIONAL LIFE

I began this text by pointing to a paradox that I suggested every practitioner and researcher in contemporary organizational life is on some level familiar with: I asserted there that while conversation among professional practitioners tends to stay clear of *explicit* normative claims, it is riddled with *covert* normative claims; claims that I summarized under the paradigmatic phrase ‘improving the status quo’. As we saw in the second chapter, the scholarly discussion is likewise defined by a rift between the emphatic affirmation of reflection as encompassing all sorts of ideals on one side and a relativistic doubt that puts the affirmation of any ideals in question on the other. It seems to me that the investigation has progressed to a point where we can make sense of this paradox in the context of the discussion on reflection. The paradox of course also applies to a certain type of responses to the normative problem of reflection; those that bypass and answer it implicitly, and I discussed the problems internal to one type of these in the previous section – what I now come to discuss is how the paradox manifests in the first place, and how it might apply to the scholarly discussion on reflection. In the terminology of the investigation, the paradox can be described as expressively asserting certain concerns or entire life conceptions without making them recognizable as such and thus available for a critically reflective conversation. Asking how the paradox manifests then equates to an inquiry into the prospects and challenges of such a conversation and, thereby, forms part of the discussion on the social ideal of a reflective life. Thus, several of the investigation’s lines of thought will converge in this discussion, which will prepare us to return to the discussion from the second chapter, and discuss the intellectual developments around the concept of reflection in the context of this investigation’s results in the next chapter.

Before that, having sketched the normative issues surrounding the prospect of a critically reflective conversation on life in the previous section, let us move on to discuss how they manifest within contemporary institutional life. This is again a loaded question, and a satisfying answer would demand an extended multi-faceted thematization involving a plurality of methods, so all I can hope to produce here is a number of qualified hunches to prepare such efforts. Specifically, I want to start by raising the question what prospects and challenges the social ideal of a reflective life, as far as its demands to being open to a critically reflective conversation on life go, can be

expected to face in a society partitioned into the spheres of private and public life, where a wide range of cooperative practices are institutionalized through organizations and professions, and where life conceptions are rendered through the adoption of social roles that entitle or commit to the engagement in these practices. I will do so by means of a discussion of MacIntyre (2007) for the reason that it provides a variety of suggestions pertaining this question, wrapped in a rather snappy critique of contemporary morality, which have been widely discussed in various domains, including organization science (Brewer, 1997; Beadle, 2002; Moore & Grandy, 2017; Sinnicks, 2018).

MacIntyre (2007) addresses some of the complications around the normative problem of reflection when he maintains that '[t]here seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture' (p.6), 'rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept' (p.8). The particular project he devotes himself to on that basis is an assessment of the state of normative conversation in contemporary society, and that includes not only a critique of the key terms employed in such debate but also an analysis of the social conditions in which it occurs (those described above). Or, in terms closer to our terminology: The question how and to what extent conversation about the good life manifests within institutional life, and what sources of legitimacy are employed for the evaluation of different life conceptions or aspects thereof. The central claim, and the claim most important for our purposes, is that moral conversation in contemporary society is dysfunctional since its standards are intelligible only in terms of a culture rooted in a shared conception of the good life, which is no longer available to modern society (MacIntyre, 2007:IX). So, MacIntyre presents a historical thesis maintaining that moral conversation and practice were once governed by a shared life conception that was generally accepted and provided the criteria needed to evaluate normative claims, and that, while these criteria may have endured nominally, they have since become meaningless, making proper evaluation of normative claims and rational choice between them impossible – contemporary moral debate, therefore, may appear to be rational, but it really is not (MacIntyre, 2007:71). Such debate may feature appeals to such concepts as rights and utility, but these appeals are baseless,

for the concepts they rely on fail to serve as the sort of normative criteria that their Enlightenment devisers designated them to. On that vein, MacIntyre rejects the concept of natural human rights as a plain fiction for whose proclaimed reality no reasons can be given, while the concept of utility is discarded as a failed attempt at the impossible task of reducing the plurality of human experience to a single axiological standard (MacIntyre, 2007:70).

I want to briefly expand on the latter because it is the concept of higher importance for organizational life and because it is tied more intimately to our question. MacIntyre argues that ‘the notion of summing them [the objects of natural and educated human desire] either for individuals or populations has no clear sense’ (MacIntyre, 2007:70), though perhaps one might respond that it has (merely) the formal sense of making evaluation of heterogeneous ends possible – the concept of utility is thus (at least) a tautological replication of the underlying intent, in that those things that have it are effectively prioritized when they are to be ranked against conceivable alternatives. The corresponding concept on the level of the individual is preference, yielding the idea of rational agents as maximizers of utility. We are confronted here, in an almost unrecognizable way, with the search for a good life conception. In fact, rather than utility, the concept of (an order of) preferences is the more interesting one. The reason is that the concept of utility simply forms the flipside of the former as an attribute of the objects of desire, rather than to characterize the desires themselves, but we can clarify their interconnection if we return to a consideration I extensively discussed in the previous chapter: that my attitudes constitute my relation to a universe of things in the world and that they determine, *qua* motivational force, my volitional dispositions to interact and experience these things in various ways. The conceptual pair of utility and preferences arises simply if we turn this relationship into a set of natural properties on the level of subject (preference) and object (utility) that can then be discussed detached from each other (making possible in the first place the notion of utility as a normative principle). We already discussed in depth the phenomena fundamental for the conception of a rational agent that optimizes states of things against a preference order, too: If the individual is supposed to have some conception of preference between different states of things, there must be some unitary context as part of which to evaluate what would be better, this context being that of the

individual's life wherein it has to decide how (better) to live, and, as we saw, that is at one the question of what attitudes to affirm (what its preferences are) and how to experience the world of things (what has utility). But the utility-maximizing rational agent does not incorporate any experiential terms, nor does it inquire into its concerns – it just simply acts in accordance with goals established by its preferences. The idea of the utility-maximizing rational agent thus represents a formal conception of the capacity of instrumental deliberation based on some (unspecified) life conception – stripped of its phenomenal character (practical rationality is modelled after a relation between the agent and goods of desire, while the attitudes that experientially constitute these relations are discarded) and critical capacity (those forms of deliberation pertaining the question what would be better and why are discarded). And if the connection of that life conception to the attitudes of the individual (and along with it all conceptions of their motivational force and reflexive properties) remains severed, the implications of such conception have to be asserted anonymously, that is through some set of impersonal standards of what would be better in the particular context of the question. The question for the good life is thus thematically omitted and left to be answered through implicit standards inherent to the researcher's 'assumptions' (in the most formal way, quantitative values for utility have to be assigned) or the undiscussed de facto life conception (however rendered through factual habits of reflection, deliberation, adherence to norms, etc.) of an empirical sample of individuals. What matters for our discussion is that the concept of utility arises from a reduction of the question for the good life to a question of instrumental rationality, and therefore describes normative stances that are not recognized and discussed as such – which, much rather than providing substantive criteria for the evaluation of possible life conceptions, can be deployed to avoid exactly those aspects of the search for a good life conception that would trigger critical reflection. In short: We can replicate and make plausible MacIntyre's claim in the terms of the investigation! Further confidence is given by the fact that MacIntyre attributes this development to the idea that modernity loses sight of the holistic context of life as the 'primary subject of objective and impersonal evaluation, of a type of evaluation which provides the content for judgement upon

the particular actions or projects of a given individual' (MacIntyre, 2007:34), though, to be sure, we'd have little to say about the empirical warrant of this historical thesis.

MacIntyre's critique of modern moral culture now rests on the following claims: Firstly, whenever someone advances a normative claim, they do so by appealing to concepts such as rights and utility that commonly supply normative argument in modern culture, treating them as if they were clear concepts suitable for rational resolution (MacIntyre, 2007:70). However, secondly, since these concepts fail to fulfill that function, conflicting normative claims are unresolvable; therefore, when it comes to the evaluation of normative claims as well as consequent action, these concepts are treated as if they provided no such criteria (MacIntyre, 2007:68). Instead, any evaluation of concerns is relegated to a choice determined by the agent's personal values, and these simply have to be asserted by a choice to which there are no criteria, as these are encompassed by the choice itself (MacIntyre, 2007:26). This argument accounts for a response to the normative problem of reflection, so let us parse it into our terminology: The sources of normative legitimacy are understood under the assumption that there is a form of critical deliberation, exercised chiefly by the devisers of moral philosophy, that can provide us with a set of transcendent normative principles, which enable us to engage in shared anonymous deliberation on conflicts within our respective concerns. This assumption, however, is only valid provided the general affirmation of some shared explicit conception of human life; a condition which is unfulfilled in contemporary society. Therefore, the assumption is unjustified, though we generally fail to recognize this problem, so that, as soon as conflicts among our respective concerns arise, we make claims to support our personal concerns by appealing to a set of anonymous principles, but we do not accept them as reasons for any rival claims. The result is that we engage in forms of shared deliberation on particular contexts as soon as we encounter conflicts of interests within them, though our actions are determined by an uncritical reflection on our respective contingent attitudes towards them. The assertion of normative claims is made by appeal to *unreflective deliberation*, the evaluation (and rejection) of normative claims is made by appeal to *uncritical reflection*. In the terms of the investigation, MacIntyre paints the picture of a society that is *closed* to the prospect of a critically reflective conversation on life. The reason is that, as per his account,



this rift does not only run through the norms of moral conversation but is, furthermore, institutionalized and thus pertains the entire context of life and the social world:

The bifurcation of the contemporary social world into a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which judgement and debate about values are central factors, but in which no rational social resolution of issues is available, finds its internalization, its inner representation in the relation of the individual to the roles and characters of social life. (MacIntyre, 2007:34)

We have here several further suggestions that concretize the abstract schematic response to the normative problem of reflection described above on the various levels of institutional life, but what I want to focus on is the domain of organizational life – the domain of professional roles and practices. On MacIntyre's account, the normative foundation of organizational life characterizes it as a social sphere where ends are systematically excluded from conversation which is thus restricted to instrumental considerations – the primary criterium that bearers of professional roles (MacIntyre specifically addresses managers and therapists here) hold their work against is that of effectiveness (MacIntyre, 2007:30). Still, for this to be possible, an organization requires some definition of costs and benefits (MacIntyre, 2007:25) and thus a conception of some ends to achieve, though the manager's role is not entitled to questioning these, but rather committed to achieve any prescribed ends (Beadle, 2002:45).

As a consequence of this Weberian panorama, the (as we discussed above, a-moralized) concept of utility is mounted as an instrumental criterium; note in this respect the peculiar agreement between MacIntyre and Friedman that the purpose of the exclusion of ends from organizational decision-making lies in the avoidance of destabilizing conflict, though the two, unsurprisingly, disagree whether to think of this as a feature or a bug (Beadle & Moore, 2006:327). For MacIntyre, to give up on critically evaluating possible ends 'entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations' (2007:23), because a non-manipulative relation would require an acknowledgement of the other's ability to evaluate her ultimate concerns, which is impossible in the absence of impersonal criteria (Sinnicks, 2018:736). Relations between different roles then have to be seen purely as the enforcement of particular

concerns, be that through instilling affective responses (the augmentation of others' concerns) or other means, but anyways not through genuine forms of shared deliberation (Sinnicks, 2018:741). The consequences for the individuals to adopt social roles are contradictory, since they at once seek to protect their personal concerns from the manipulative incursion of others, and, in asserting these concerns, come seek to engage in the manipulation of others (MacIntyre, 2007:68). MacIntyre's thesis then, phrased in our terms, is that the social roles that structure cooperative forms of behavior within contemporary organizations entail a commitment to manipulate the social other into regulative reflection of the sort that shapes their concerns to serve mine, and that for their bearers there can be no such thing as mutually aiding each other in critical reflection. In other words: Contemporary organizations are spaces wherein living a reflective life, even in the limited sense of an openness for critically reflective conversation on life, is impossible.

So far, so bad. This is obviously a stark reproach, and there have been various attempts of refuting it or of exempting individual professions or forms of behavior from it (e.g. Brewer, 1997; Dunne, 2003; Sinnicks, 2018), but I do not want to enter this discussion here. What matters more to me is that, if we complement what has been said with some further suggestions, it also yields a positive conception of the normative foundations of professional practice and organizational life which we can then refer back to our discussion of the social ideal of a reflective life. So, how would cooperative practices need to look like in a community to escape the moral ruin MacIntyre attests to contemporary society? Firstly, there would be a conscious distinction between the 'internal goods' of a practice, that is those concerns whose pursuit gives the practice its original purpose, and its 'external goods', i.e., the instrumental concerns to make the (effective) pursuit of the prior possible (Beadle, 2002:330). Specifically, the members of an organization to engage in the practice would be encouraged to care about it intrinsically and to subordinate extrinsic concerns (Moore & Grandy, 2017:151). To protect the integrity of the pursuit of the practice's internal goods, the practitioners would need to engage in a continuous shared deliberation on the concerns that give the practice its purpose (MacIntyre, 2007:220) and, since the concerns inherent to different practices may come to rival each other in some contexts of the life of the community, these forms of deliberation would find their criteria in a 'telic, social vision' of life, i.e. in a normative

conversation on the holistic context of life (Beadle, 2002:332). At the same time, in so recognizing and appreciating the ‘essentially moral’ character of the organization, its members would make use of it as a space in which to develop and exercise the virtues (see Moore & Grandy, 2017:149), i.e. those qualities required to pursue both the concerns internal to the practice as well as those established by their shared conception of the good life (MacIntyre, 2007:219). In other words: Organizational life would need to be *sustained by* a critically reflective conversation on life. This, however, it cannot, because the compartmentalization of life into distinct social spheres and their roles runs counter to any attempt of thematizing life as a holistic context (MacIntyre, 2007:204). In MacIntyre’s words: ‘Our conditions of work are such and our institutions are such that there is rarely any milieu within which, in the company of others, we can step back from the established ongoing order of things and raise questions about it’ (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002:3); conditions he sees in contrast to those faced by the Athenians of the classical period who ‘had not insulated, as we have by a set of institutional devices, the pursuit of political ends from dramatic representation or the asking of philosophical questions from either’ (MacIntyre, 2007:138). In the end, we are thus confronted again with the whole conception of living a reflective life.

Let us take a step back and consider what the discussion of MacIntyre’s theory implies for the investigation. As far as this investigation is concerned, we have in MacIntyre’s theory two claims: Firstly, the thesis that meaningful conversation on the normative foundations of professional practice is impossible if it fails to thematize the holistic context of life. And secondly, an account of how the frustration of a certain expectation towards the prospect of critical deliberation on the sources of normative legitimacy (the expectation that it will lead us to recognize a set of abstract and anonymous normative criteria) manifests in an institutional partitioning of life that renders the bearers of professional roles incapable of engaging in shared deliberation on the good life. These are strong claims that call for extended inquiry and evaluation. MacIntyre’s thoughts on the compartmentalization of life also stand in contrast to those of Rorty discussed in the previous section. But I want to affirm or reject neither of them here. What matters is that we have, in exemplary form, an account of how the prospect of critically reflecting on life can become acute within institutional life – and of how deeply involved it is with the normative foundations of

professional practice and thus with any version of ‘improving the status quo’ a practitioner might aspire to.<sup>30</sup> In the previous chapter I already discussed how the motivational dynamics inherent to the prospect of critically reflecting on life might discourage an individual to engage in such forms of reflection. I then extended the account to encompass the social dimension of expressive reflection, and the discussion in this chapter added a number of considerations to make plausible how the normative problems surrounding the prospect of critical reflection might discourage entire communities to mutually aid each other in critically reflecting on life. Together, they form an extended thought experiment on the psychological and ethical challenges to the social ideal of a reflective life. As I said earlier, I do not want to provide a definitive normative account on these issues – developing a coherent and complete ethos around the phenomena of reflection and deliberation is a task for a lifetime and one that is, as this investigation suggests, best approached through conversation with others. Therefore, I want to leave the different positions we encountered in this chapter and in Chapter 2 as possible offerings that make for interlocutors in an extended conversation. Still, over the course of the discussion on the social ideal of a reflective life in the context of professional practice we have come across a number of considerations that have far-reaching implications on the life of the individual practitioner. Concretizing these in an exhaustive manner would be another possible topic for future conversation, but I want to conclude this chapter with some vague ideas.

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I have so far spared you from my own Frankensteinian attempt at a creature called ‘the reflective practitioner’, and, frankly, I would prefer to leave it at that, because I am not sure if turning the

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<sup>30</sup> We only discussed some versions in this investigation, so there would be an extended effort of confronting the predominant normative idioms of contemporary life. The grand prizes seem to be the concepts of ‘value’, ‘well-being’, and ‘progress’. In the concept of ‘well-being’ the connection to the concept of a good life is still apparent, though made a matter of empirical concerns, and thus often unavailable for a critically reflective conversation. The concept of ‘value’ is more difficult because we have a larger plurality of different conceptions at work; e.g., values, as used in ‘personal values’ denote those generalizable features of particular answers to the question for the good life that serve to establish a shared life conception among the members of a community, which thereby provides criteria for the shared evaluation of particular concerns. But when we speak of values of things, the concept comes much closer to what we said about utility, where value roughly denotes something that someone cares about. In either case, the discussion would have to go through the notion of concerns, but I do not want to enter it here.

ideal of a reflective life into any kind of personal identity is helpful. As we saw, there is a problem in claiming the title 'reflective' as a distinction for one's way of life. Of course, asking what impact the affirmation of such an ideal would have on the life of an individual and the practices, organizations, and ideals involved therein is interesting and important, so, if this investigation entitles us to speak of something comparable to a 'reflective practitioner', that name would designate a bearer of professional roles, in research or practice, *aspiring* to live a reflective life. As I said earlier, concretizing a social ideal in the context of concrete forms of life is an extensive endeavor that cannot be approached purely on the conceptual level. Still, I would not want to end this investigation without at least some tentative thoughts on this question. So, let us conclude the discussion by asking what we'd have to say about the social ideal of a reflective life in an individual life characterized by the assumption of professional roles.

I want to focus on one essential point here, which follows very directly from our discussion: A reflective practitioner – for convenience only, I will use the term as an abbreviation for the sort of individual described above – would be concerned about the state of a critically reflective conversation (on life) in her institutional context. The social ideal of a reflective life centers around a conversation about how it is like to live and how we should live, based on what we care about. The first question to ask by a reflective practitioner would be to what degree such a conversation is present and possible within the organizational environment of her social role(s). In extension, she would ask to what degree her society at large features or lacks a formal infrastructure required for its members to live a reflective life.

This inquiry would include the question to what degree established forms of (communicative) behavior are ready to accommodate *both* critical deliberation and disinterested reflection. For instance, forms of communicative behavior inside an organization may be concerned with applying, developing, and questioning a certain terminology to assess the concerns affirmed by that organization, but at the same time be restricted to a 'professional' mode of conversation that necessarily excludes thematizations of a person's life. But as per the account developed, critical reflection is incomplete if it is prohibited from encompassing one's life, the holistic context of one's attitudes, because only that will make an adequate comparative evaluation of which

attitudes to affirm as ultimate ends possible. In institutional contexts where a critically reflective conversation is unavailable, the pursuit of the forms of reflection required to make sense of one's life is thus restricted to the social spheres outside of public life.<sup>31</sup> Of course, the need for that pursuit does not vanish, and it is plausible to think that, where the individual fails to find or create the social environment suited for such a conversation, the need to thematize her ultimate concerns will be relegated to symbolic forms of expression. The pursuit of 'public' concerns thus becomes meddled by covert 'private' interests. The more tragic consequence is that the individual is at risk of becoming something she does not care about becoming, to live her life in a way that does not meet the concerns she would affirm if she were to reflect critically on them. A reflective practitioner would thus attend to problems of this sort in her own life and that of her social counterparts.

To do so successfully, she would be committed to acquiring not only the capabilities needed to perform the functions demanded by her social roles, but also those needed to make a critically reflective conversation on life possible and to act effectively towards whatever life conception forms the outcome. For a lack of a better word: she would be in pursuit not only of *skills*, but of *virtues* (MacIntyre, 2007:219). As far as these are contingent on some answer to the question for the good life, they cannot be derived from her particular concerns, but only from a life conception (MacIntyre, 2007:201) which the practitioner would therefore also need to make explicit to herself. For the reason that the practitioner might face a sort of dilemma in that the particular concerns inherent to her roles and organizations entail no interest for a holistic thematization of particular interests so that these institutional vehicles set up for the achievement of particular concerns have no reason to enable critical reflection, the development and exercise of these capabilities might demand ways of personal development established outside of or against institutional contingencies.

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<sup>31</sup> There is of course no reason why the tendency among researchers and practitioners to opt for certain traditions of thought and practice should be exempt from these complications, and it is here where the remarks on the reflexivity of research practices become relevant. As Schön already remarked with respect to academic debate: researchers should 'reflect *on* their frames', not just 'act *from* them' (Schön, 1983:312)

When trying to articulate her life conception, a reflective practitioner would critically deliberate on her 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 1983). The reason, trivially, is that the necessary prerequisite for any meaningful conversation on life is the adoption of a terminology that enables the speakers to do so. The partitioning of institutional life stands against this, and it seems to me that in precisely this sense contemporary professional discourse proves most detrimental to reflective conversation – an honest conversation about what one cares about becomes difficult under the advance of such pseudo-technical terms as 'incentive', 'stakeholder', 'value', 'well-being', and 'utility', making comparative discussion within a unified view on life practically unachievable for the most. The individual is tasked with piecing the mosaic back together if it is not to fall victim to the kind of split morality MacIntyre globally attests to modern human beings, and a reflective practitioner would strive to relocate such technical terms into an inclusive and accessible conversation where normative terms and claims are recognized as such. In academic practice, this, I presume, warrants a personal conversation about metatheoretical concerns. In all honesty, looking back on this investigation, I am doubtful how helpful some of the abstractions entertained there are on a theoretical level. I am simply not sure to what extent authors that embellish their reasoning with remarks on 'the socially constructed nature of reality', 'the methodical blindness of positivist rationality', 'an autopoietic deconstruction of one's deconstructions', and the likes are really concerned with ontological positions, and not rather with normative stances on the having or foregoing of certain types of conversation, or, more profanely, with concerns pertaining to their social role. The more tangible problem then lies not in concerns about the ontological status of some abstract collective inventory of knowledge, but in the personal lives of the interlocutors – and the very real problem of positivism and relativism, understood not as intellectual vehicles but as factual ethical stances, is that they may lead people to live lives they would, upon critically reflective examination, not want to live; that they prevent people from engaging in such examination; and that they provide the researcher or practitioner with the justification not to care about these problems. Summarized a bit pointedly: Emphasizing the 'socially constructed nature of reality' should commit one to making just that recognizable and available for practical conversation in one's work. Or, if the above is an unfair criticism, this is anyways what the

aspirations of a reflective practitioner would entail. On a more tangible level, the conception of a critically reflective conversation on life may also be useful in the development of methods, as several comparable attempts already exist (see Chapter 2). This may be because facilitating such a conversation helps to pursue the concerns internal to some existing methods, but what the conception would offer primarily is a *criterium* for any methods that aspire to be conducive towards or constitutive of a reflective life. The conception may thus serve as a touchstone for the development of new methods or for the redefinition of existing ones.

These are just some preliminary considerations on what the social ideal of a reflective life may entail for professional practice; they could be expanded, and to substantiate and evaluate them, they would require multi-faceted investigation. For now, let me, to conclude this discussion, suggest four questions for a researcher or practitioner aspiring to live a critically reflective life, where the first two are questions to be asked by communities of reflective practitioners:

1. How might we ensure that each individual in our community has, at all times throughout their life, the opportunity to engage in a shared critically reflective conversation on life (and that entails the opportunity to acquire all the capabilities required to engage in such a conversation)?
2. How might we ensure that the institutions that determine to which extent each individual is able to pursue their respective life conception are defined, instated, and controlled by a critically reflective conversation on life that includes all those affected by these institutions?
3. How do the purposes inherent to my social roles and my idiosyncratic conceptions of ‘improving the status quo’ determine how I live my life (my attitudes and behavior at large) and how might I engage in shared deliberation on them and those of others?
4. What capabilities and conditions would be required to facilitate a critically reflective conversation within the institutional context I find myself in and how might I enable myself and others to realize them?



## **6. WHAT FOLLOWS FROM THIS WORK AND WHY IT MATTERS**

I tried, with this text, to point your attention to a phenomenon whose thematization I believe is crucial to any successful methodological or normative discussion as part of which interlocutors can be expected to fully live up to the task of making understood what they mean and what they care about. The gist of this work is that reflection, or rather the specific forms thereof scholars of professional practice have in mind when talking about it, is not a methodological or normative silver bullet, but it does enable us to inquire into the foundations of professional practice. Critically reflecting on life does not necessarily make us moral, but it makes moral conversation possible: it makes it possible for us to jointly ask what would be a good life and define normative criteria on that basis. With that, let us return to the discussion from Chapter 2 and see what we have to say about the discussion on reflection among scholars of professional practice, to then outline some of the implications and limitations of this work.

### **6.1. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER CONVERSATION**

I initiated the investigation by raising the question what we mean when we use the term ‘reflection’; a question that I also relied on when formally diving into this whole endeavor, as it formed the outcome of my autoethnographic explorations of my personal versions of ‘improving the status quo’. Since, we have embarked on what must appear as a forced march through the human condition that has seemingly led us far away from the original intent. But this intellectual journey, I argue, is necessary even for the limited project of making sense of the concept of reflection. To make this assertion plausible, let us return to the discussion from the second chapter and discuss the dynamics within the scholarly discussion on reflection in the context of what we discussed since then!

We discussed in the previous chapter how a reduction of the search for a good life to an instrumental pursuit of a posited life conception allows to circumvent an acknowledgement of the normative character of an otherwise necessarily critical effort to make up one’s mind on how to live. With this we can return to the originally strictly epistemological-noetic orientation of the

scholarly discussion on reflection, because it is under the pretext of this reduction and a compartmentalization of institutional life into different spheres and specialized roles that reflection becomes intelligible as an epistemology of professional practice, as a capacity to solve (and later, affirm or reject) problems of means. Reflection is here thought of as an anonymous deliberation on specific contexts (established by the respective sphere and role whether that is appreciated or not) that becomes necessary as soon as the pursuit of given concerns becomes non-trivial and thus in need of deliberate action – and to make sense of this, no recourse on the motivational or experiential properties of attitudes is needed, so that they can be reduced to their instrumental function within an epistemological discussion. Schön's inclusion of (still contextually established) ends into the deliberation opens a Pandora's Box of normativity, because deliberation here becomes critical to a limited degree, i.e. within the confines of institutional entities. Much emphasis has been placed on Schön's accentuation of tacit knowledge (for its descriptive power when discussing the practical reality of professional practice), but the inclusion of concerns is the far more important step when discussing the foundations of professional practice because it ultimately threatens the restriction of the phenomenon to particular institutional contexts. So, while Schön is still committed to an epistemological perspective on the phenomenon, the true achievement of his conception rests on its normative implications.

The reason is that, as we saw, critical deliberation, if taken seriously, ultimately escalates to encompass the holistic context of life, so it is unsurprising that in the further discussion the context of reflection has been widened to encompass all sorts of psychological and socio-cultural domains – and while scholars have been very aware of this contextual shift and even made it the criterium for definitory distinctions, these different contexts remained strangely isolated, making different conceptions rather arbitrary constructs in service of the scholar's metatheoretical concerns; this arbitrariness clears up when we relocate all these isolated conceptions within an overarching context. It then seems that the normative dimension of reflection is implied but only partly recognized in Schön's 'reflection-in-action' as a rival concept to positivist epistemology, and that there is a missing link between his conception and those advanced by advocates of a normative turn; this missing link being the phenomenon of reflecting on the holistic context of

one's life. What thus ensues is a game of intellectual ping-pong where scholars such as Mezirow develop a more thorough conception that lays the groundwork for an appreciation of the social dimension of critical reflection and for an appropriation of this for the development of specialized communicative practices in the domains of personal life that is then readapted to the spheres of organizational life. These discussions remain separated because the notion of reflecting on life (to form attitudes towards my attitudes as a whole, and as we saw that encompasses not only a diachronic awareness of the *entire* temporal context between birth and death of the individual, but at the same time as way of referring to the world *as a whole* insofar as I thematize what things in the world I at all care about) is not appreciated as underlying any mode of fragmentation in institutional life.

Over the course of this development, the phenomenal view on reflection shifts as well, from a purely noetic perspective as required by instrumental deliberation to encompassing emotions and forms of behavior; but this development is never really conceptually accounted for, so that reflection remains seen through an epistemological lens, where emotions appear as alternative forms of knowledge. The reason here seems to be that the phenomenon is primarily viewed through whatever concerns motivate its thematization which leads the researcher to incorporate those aspects relevant to the construction of their envisioned ideal, but without having satisfactory criteria to compare different conceptions. Such would have to be established by a discussion on how the underlying phenomenon manifests in experience and language, and this discussion is precisely what called for a distinction between the activities of reflection and deliberation. To make this discussion feasible, I restricted this investigation to reflection, and excluded reflexivity, but it is important to highlight now that this inquiry also helps us to phenomenally substantiate reflexivity and relate it to reflection: The special instance of reflexivity in the context of reflection, understood as thematizing one's own attitudes, is found in the reflexive properties of attitudes; Frankfurt addresses this instance of reflexivity when he says 'the human mind is *reflexive*' (2004a:17), but in the philosophical debate it is generally discussed under the concept of intentionality. Reflexivity then is indeed an important concept to make sense of reflection – as it highlights the fact that we have attitudes *about* attitudes – but it is

seriously misplaced if it is mounted as a rival conception of reflection, because these terms just refer to different things. This of course does not preclude the relevance of other instances of reflexivity, such as the idea that research practices can and ought to thematize their institutional context, but (to be fair, without having done the necessary exercise) my intuition is that these instances can ultimately be reduced to and explained in the terms of the conception advanced in this investigation, while I cannot envision the reverse.

To summarize the problems in the scholarly debate as seen from the perspective of this investigation: Since reflection and deliberation are never conceptually distinguished and the importance of the context of life never fully recognized, the different discussions remain somewhat isolated so that the only way to distinguish rival conceptions, besides a fragmentation of research practice into different institutional spheres, is by the *drawing of definitory lines*. Many of the dynamics and complications internal to the scholarly discussion on reflection become intelligible and comparable once we locate the different conceptions within the larger context of reflection and deliberation in life.

The results of the investigation are interesting because, as far as their practical implications are concerned, they mark a thematic return to Dewey's original conception of reflection as something that sustains democratic culture. At the same time, the final theme of the investigation, the social ideal of a reflective life, is not much like Dewey's conception of reflection at all – the result here, especially as far as the aspects thematized in the previous chapter's discussion are concerned, is much closer to Mezirow's notion of a reflective discourse. The important distinction is that this investigation sought to establish definitory criteria that constitute the *reality* of the concept as substantiated by the underlying phenomena, whereas Mezirow's conception primarily seeks to establish empirical pedagogic criteria that constitute the *realization* of the phenomenon. But comparing these conceptions would certainly be a worthy endeavor, as would a critical comparison with the larger context of Dewey's other works. There are of course other traditions that would make for suitable sparring partners when deliberating on the conceptual account advanced here (Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt come to mind).

Towards its end, I extended the investigation to an open discussion on the state of a certain type of conversation which, I believe, any human community ought to have as long as it aspires to a genuinely free and self-determined life for all of its members, and, as far as the consequences of this work are concerned, much hinges on whether that is agreed upon or not. If so, the first step would be to raise the question whether we should say that we do or ought to provide a public infrastructure in the various domains of institutional life for the realization of such a conversation, as well as for the provision of the sort of capabilities we must hold as necessary to do so, and that is largely a question of particular empirical conditions. If, under this pretext, MacIntyre's fatalism were confirmed, if we were to say that we lack within the contemporary organizational landscape a formal environment for having a reflective conversation about one's life, this would have far-reaching consequences. The important question to ask here is if the social ideal of living a reflective life is, in contemporary organizations, relegated to the sphere of the private, making it a matter of contingency whether an individual educated within contemporary society comes to live a reflective life, and to what degree this should be matter of shared concern within different organizations. The implications are manifold, but include a rethinking of life-long education, away from the mere provision of technical skills and towards the training of certain forms of communicative practice, and here would be an interface between the conception of a critically reflective conversation and possible methods to realize it in different organizational settings. On an analytical level this would necessitate empirical research into what makes communities succeed in sustaining such forms of conversations and what makes them fail. There is, additionally, the prospect of a whole body of inquiries to evaluate such practices under the pretext of external concerns, and chiefly among that is the question to what degree these practices could be conducive towards certain psychological states (different established conceptions of well-being), cooperative attitudes, or organizational goals. There is certainly more to be said about possible avenues of consecutive research and to what extent they are fulfilled by existing scholarship, but instead of expanding on these ideas, I want to address some of the limitations of this work.

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The most obvious limitations come with the very nature of this work: What I advanced here was a thought experiment for which the prospect of external criteria is precarious. On that basis, I have now defined reflection in a certain way that partly departs from the way the term is used in the literature, but with some significant consequences. The easy objection would be that there are, of course, no definitive reasons why the term should be defined as I did. I would agree to this, but emphasize that what matters is to distinguish between different phenomena, here: ways to thematize one's own attitudes and things in the world, because that's what enables us to talk about the ways in which we talk about ourselves and the world, and, consequently, change these ways. So, the essential criterium for whether the account is held to be adequate or not again is how conducive it is towards the social ideal it produced, and whether that is something we ought to adopt leads us back to the same place. You just do not get rid of the circularity. The most important caveat that presides over the question if defenses of that sort are valid or not is therefore the question if I, and others, have not gone hopelessly wrong about the methodological classification of the phenomenon.

On a more technical level, the perhaps biggest shortcoming of my discussion of the philosophical theories employed again has to do with the scope of this work. While I do believe that this investigation stands in a meaningful and critical discussion with the philosophical authors it relies on, articulating and justifying this claim would have committed me to a comprehensive presentation, categorization, and discussion of their respective positions as contrasted with my own. The depth and range of positions was far too vast to perform such an undertaking faithfully, so I gave preference to a methodical approach that takes hold of the respective texts as composite material to be reassembled, rather than as monolithic works. Upon the most critical reading, they therefore should be looked at as (mere) informants and inspirations for the development of a systematic position. Some possible avenues of possible critical remarks are provided by my use of the concepts of attitude and practice. A thematization of the prior rather quickly leads into a desperate pursuit of a satisfying ontological theory of language and mind, while the latter might be more controllable and one of the shortcomings of my work is that Tugendhat, Frankfurt, and MacIntyre all offer theories that could have been appropriated in the conceptual development

which could thus be expanded to a theory of reflective practices. Another shortcoming in my use of MacIntyre is that he ‘sees relations between social structures, social roles [...] and the framework of ideas in which agency comes to be understood, as intimate’ (Beadle & Moore, 2006:324) which does not necessarily override the discussion of his account’s consequences, but it might imply that he would disagree with the conceptual account I developed with Tugendhat. There are certainly further fracture points on the technical level, but again, I would always choose failing at pursuing what matters over succeeding at what does not. On that note, what I hope to contribute with this work is to make forms of conversation possible in organizational settings where they might be needed, but where we lack the understanding or courage to engage in them. Let me make a first step in this effort by ending with a reflection on this work.

## **6.2. REFLECTING ON THIS ENDEAVOR**

Allow me to end on a personal note, for what suitable way to conclude this endeavor if not by reflecting on it, by thematizing my attitudes towards it.

This project formed in different ways the completion of a decade of taking steps into professional life, of experiencing different professional domains and different parts of the world. Part of the reason is that this project involved and started with what I understand to be my first disinterested critical reflection on my life – a genuinely open-ended intellectual inquiry into what attitudes I have towards my life and what attitudes I should have. It is my hope, and for that matter the only criterion that really matters to me upon critical reflection, that in finding a vocabulary to articulate this attempt I have managed to help clarify what’s at play in such moments as well as some of the misconceptions that lead us to shy away from them. This text is, if it comes down to it, merely an attempt to formalize this experience – asking myself a question – and the personal hope I associate now, at its conclusion, with it is that this formalization provides the ground for a further, long-term, engagement with that question; not a mere recapitulation of it as posed by this text, but an attempt to translate it into an actual conversation of the sort I described that gives rise to altered opportunities to engage in practice within the human community.

When I started this project, I of course did so with the hope that it would grant me some definitive idea on how to live, something that faithfully distilled the essence of all these experiences into some workable conception. Seeing that hope frustrated when confronting the intuitive fascination with such things as an ‘authentic life’ with critical remarks of the sort given by Rorty was a disorienting, but finally pleasantly sobering experience. Instead, the project leads into a direction that I find intuitively agreeable, because it helped me to make sense of a question that has kept me busy for a while now: why it seems so difficult, often outright impossible, for us to have certain forms of conversation, free of manipulative rationales towards the likes of status, moral dominance, and self-worth, in which the parties find themselves able and willing to disclose and critically explore what life is to them. If that makes for anything like an answer to my initial question it is that the essential response we can give as human beings to the sort of openness that our existence comes with lies in confronting this openness in all spectrums of experience with honesty, together. My hope at the end of this endeavor is that it forms a part in helping us see the tragedy that lies in how we make this impossible in our futile pursuits of transcendence and completion. How the way we lose ourselves in role identities and abstract ideals makes us incapable of caring about what matters. It personally took me a long time to make steps towards an awareness of these things, and it may well be so that critical reflection played a part in this, though honestly, I think the confrontation with the sort of suffering in oneself and others these obsessions produce, contrasted with wholesome explorations of other people’s living realities goes a longer way in explaining this process. Of course, all this is speculation, because, arguably, the most important question I have not addressed in this work – and that is the question of what would be the sort of qualities and conditions that need to be in place to successfully open to the prospect of critically reflecting on one’s life.

Writing this text was a bit of a bittersweet experience because I am aware that it, being a work done on the graduate level, in all likelihood will be never read and discussed. At the same time, this was also the intellectually most challenging thing I have done, but it seems to me that these complications are partly a product of our culture and education system. We do seem to have only a limited commitment in our organizational landscape to enable sincere efforts to make up one’s



mind on how to live, which strikes me as insane if it is true that a successful engagement in these is a necessary condition for a self-determined life and that the alternative would be a surrender to contingency. Gathering the sort of experiences and capabilities that led me to this project is thus also the result of a continuous rejection to follow the implicit demands of the processes by which we introduce new members to our society. My minimal goal with this was to not skip what I hold to be the essential personal responsibility of engaging, here in systematic form, in the project of sorting out where one stands in life. A life may go well or not, but it seems that the task of asking what one aspires to should it go well is more important than the question if it actually happens to go well. This work of course only represents a formal description of this effort and its social conditions, but it also partly constitutes it, precisely because part of what matters to me is to live in the sort of community in which these efforts are both possible and encouraged, and I hope that this work contributes to making such communities possible.

The consoling insight is that taking steps towards this should be neither complicated nor unachievable. Not only do, as of today, a large number of people enjoy, at least partially, the political freedom to create the sort of culture and organizations vital to a critically reflective conversation on life – we thus still find ourselves in quite an exceptional historical situation, even if cracks appear. What's more, the good news is that, if what I discussed in this text is not entirely inaccurate, the social ideal of a reflective life and a discussion thereof can be of use in virtually the entirety of social life, and its key demands are very simple: They require us to have, wherever we can, a conversation that is *both* personal and critical on how we experience our lives in thoughts and feelings, hopes, and fears, and to ask ourselves which of these should guide us in the conscious making of our social world. Acknowledging the importance of such a conversation and inquiring into what makes it so difficult for us to have would be a step towards emotional and rational maturity of our society. It would mean being ready for freedom. Let me conclude with a personal opinion on why any of this matters, in particular within the university system!

As, I presume, has become obvious, this endeavor leaves me slightly disillusioned about the state of organizational life. The frustration of naïve beliefs in the virtue of the powerful may be a natural rite of passage and a welcome source of humility and empathy, but, even beyond that, it seems to

me that something is rotten in the state of conversation. The overwhelming share of academic literature I have found to actually have something to say predate the current century, not to speak of the forms of debate we now have in politics and media. My impression is that inquiries informed by an authentic concern about the nature of the human experience have drowned in self-referential institutional games in which thinking about phenomena has become largely instrumental. Inquiries are primarily a currency within a research community occupied with 'spotting gaps' and constructing fashionable ideologies within them. I find this metaphor highly useless; not only is the confidence in this imagined inventory of knowledge precarious, but due to the features of propositional language, the possibilities of what could be said are endless. The better metaphor would perhaps be 'filling the void'. Much of what is thus said seems to collapse under a simple 'so what?'. What's worse, the ample criticisms to these circumstances often seem informed by ideological dissatisfaction about predominant paradigms (often barely disguised relatives of their counterparts in politics and media), much rather than an honest concern about a necessarily disinterested inquiry within a pluralism of paradigms. The problem with research and education informed by extrinsic motivation founded in personal ambition, intellectual insecurity, and ideological belief is, simply put, that the people tasked by society with inquiring into phenomena do not ultimately care about these very phenomena, or are unable to pursue their concerns if they do. This is not only disheartening when confronted with basic expectations of conscientiousness and integrity, it also severs a vital function for a society to sustain peaceful and fulfilling forms of coexistence, if one believes that an honest and inclusive conversation about the human experience is something that vitally sustains the human community and its readiness to approach the task of existence cooperatively, and that the education system is the designated locus for such conversation. Perhaps it would be good to take a first step back and raise the question how the organizational landscape, in research and practice, could provide spaces for the development and expression of a genuine concern for the phenomenon of human life. Ultimately, the reason why paralysis in metatheoretical concerns, dogmatism, and relativism have to be overcome is simple: Realities may be contingent, but even more so that leaves us with a burden to arrange them in accordance to what we care about. That society, with the social sciences at its

forefront, seems to settle more and more eagerly on treating this burden with ideology and ignorance makes me deeply worried about the future of the world I live in. I believe this text matters because recognizing the motif in human life to respond with regulative and uncritical reflection to the dread experienced in face of contingency and impermanence could help us instate forms of practice in which we find it possible to care about each other unconditionally; it could help prevent the cruelty that awaits if we continue on the current path. By the end of this endeavor, I do not longer give credibility to the intuition that an inquiry into the phenomenon of human life elevates one to such a thing as an authentic mode of life and humanity. But one thing seems clearer to me than ever: If rational, inclusive, and empathetic conversation on what it is like for us to live and how we should live dies, so do our means to protect ourselves from anxiety and cruelty. And that, at least, is something we should be concerned about.

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