Mind & Time

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The Language of Time and Self-Consciousness

1. Naturalism and the Life of Persons

When we look for distinctive features of the human life-form, we encounter language, self-consciousness, and time. It is these features that we must refer to in answering the question *What does it mean to lead the life of a person?* This question is usually answered in the narrower contexts of philosophy of mind and ethics. In contrast to the conventional approach, this question will be answered, in the following chapter, on the basis of an extended, i.e., non-eliminative, naturalism which seeks access to the essential features of the life of persons *via* their language, behavior, and action.

The eliminative varieties of naturalism have attracted a great deal of attention, especially in methodological debates of the twentieth century—consider, for example, Logical Empiricism, W. V. Quine, or Daniel Dennett – extended naturalism can look back on a long history. It spans from Anaximander and Aristotle to Spinoza, Hume, Wilfrid Sellars, Stuart Hampshire, Peter F. Strawson, and John McDowell. Like any version of naturalism, it is characterized by its insistence on the ontological unity of reality and the rejection of supranaturalistic explanations. It differs from the eliminativist versions, however, in its use of an enlarged concept of what there is, in its methodological pluralism, and in the importance it attaches to epistemological and linguistic clarifications, and, most of all, it does not exclude the question *What does it mean to lead the life of a person?*[1]

Due to the importance that extended naturalism gives to conceptual analysis and epistemological evaluation, it comes close, in different ways, to both classical and more recent positions in the philosophy of mind. Unlike classical positions, it does not take a subjective, phenomenological, or normative approach. Self-consciousness

[1] Cf. Sturma 2019, 147–151.

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and time are addressed—following the general naturalistic strategy—from the outside. This approach goes hand in hand with the rejection of the method of introspection, which plays a significant role, especially in traditional philosophy of mind and ethics. Naturalistic approaches, by and large, are characterized by the strong belief that the experiences of a person are not introspectively accessible—neither from the outside nor from the inside. There is no private language in the sense that a person could refer to her mental data or impressions. As with the experience of other persons, the ways of dealing with our own experience are linguistically determined.[2]

In contrast to eliminative approaches, however, extended naturalism implies that descriptions of the world which do not take into account the conduct of persons *as* persons, are based on unjustified eliminations and oversimplifications. According to an extended naturalism, persons are subject to causes that the natural sciences at least partially reveal, but they are also susceptible to reasons. The actions of persons show the ontological distinction to bring about changes in the world of events by virtue of their self-awareness and ability to differentiate and act for reasons. This unique capability manifests itself in the peculiar grammar of the word »I«[3] and the language of time in which the elusive phenomena of self-consciousness and time leave identifiable traces—as can be impressively demonstrated by the expressions »I« and »now.« In the end, it turns out that the language of time holds the key to answering the question of what it means to lead the life of a person.

2. Self-Reference and Linguistic Behavior

In a general sense, linguistic behavior is about thought and action.[4] Extended naturalism, in accounting for the human life-form, can rely

[2] Cf. Strawson 1959, 100, 106: »One can ascribe states of consciousness to oneself only if one can ascribe them to others. One can ascribe them to others only if one can identify other subjects of experience. And one cannot identify others if one can identify them *only* as subjects of experience, possessors of states of consciousness. […] There is no sense in the idea of ascribing states of consciousness to oneself, or at all, unless the ascriber already knows how to ascribe at least some states of consciousness to others.«

[3] See Wittgenstein 1964, 65–78.

[4] Cf. Hampshire 1959, Austin 1975.

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on linguistic behavior as its empirical foundation. Linguistic behavior is a specific way to change the course of events. It emerges from a systematic interrelation between mind, world, reference, and self-reference. The perspectives of the first-person, second-person, and third-person, respectively the standpoints of the reflecting and acting person, and external observers, register the inferential interaction between language, self-awareness, attitudes, behavior, and action in which shapes of the inside of the outside of the human life-form are revealed.

Thoughts are about something. They are expressed in a rule-governed manner by intentional and propositional attitudes. In line with this, the content of thoughts is constituted along syntactic and semantic rules.[5] These rules are different from the workings of neural micro-mechanisms, which eliminativist positions take as their empirical reference point. Thus, the question arises as to when and where what is physical becomes something psychological and logical. When answering this question, it is particularly important to clarify how to understand the relationship between the various levels of neural micro-mechanisms, on the one hand, and the language of thoughts, on the other. But it has to be admitted that we are far away from understanding the dependencies between changes of behavior and their corresponding neural micro-mechanisms.

Thoughts can be questioned and examined within the space of reasons. They are about something and have content—all the same, they are subjective in the sense that the thinking person has in an epistemic sense privileged access to her thoughts. But it is the lesson of analytic conceptual analysis that privileged access does not mean that thoughts are exclusively private or confined to an inner world. When analyzing thoughts or states of consciousness, it is important to clarify the semantic foundations of the mentalistic vocabulary that is used to address the abilities and characteristics of persons. Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out that the expressions of the mentalistic vocabulary are not meant as representations or reifications, but rather as

[5] For Sellars thoughts and rules are inextricably linked to social practice. Accordingly, rules or rule-governed behaviour are to be regarded as essential manifestations of the human life-form: »When God created Adam, he whispered in his ear, 'In all contexts of action you will recognize rules, if only the rule to grope for rules to recognize. When you cease to recognize rules, you will walk on four feet.'" (Sellars 1980, 138).

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different linguistic instruments.[6] Facts are not mirrored in the language but are expressed in a specific syntactic and semantic form.

In the case of empirical knowledge, we do not stand in a mysterious kind of contact with the world outside. Wilfrid Sellars was very influential in unmasking the fallacies of the myth of the given. He demonstrated that mental data are not unconditionally presented to us, but rather depend on linguistic rules.[7] According to Sellars, our everyday language already contains far-reaching assumptions and conjectures about the attitudes and states of our consciousness. This includes assigning the observable behavior of persons to an interpretation that contains hypotheses about attitudes of consciousness that cannot be observed. The semantic framework of everyday language ultimately determines the meaning of predicates that people ascribe to other people and to themselves. Sellars elaborates that the understanding of the attitudes and self-relations of persons are carried out in the logical space of reasons as the inferential system of determined predicates. In the case of conceiving the state of mind of other persons, our everyday language thus does not simply depict something, but rather makes assumptions about something hidden to us under the conditions of referential uncertainty. The consequence is that statements about mental states are more or less to be treated as theoretical hypotheses.

The mentalistic vocabulary develops by way of conjectures, confirmations, predictions and refusals, and persons must always deal with epistemic uncertainty in their attitudes and actions—this applies to the subjective perspective of a person, to communicative situations and, equally, to the intersubjective perspective of external observers. The respective scope of action is neither completely transparent to the individual person nor to external observers. These limitations, however, are no reason for a fundamental skepticism about propositional attitudes or epistemic and practical self-relations. It is plausible to assume that, with acute observation and good reasoning, we are often right.

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[6] See Wittgenstein 1964, 67: »The word »I« does not mean the same as »L.W.« even if I am L.W., nor does it mean the same as the expression »the person who is now speaking«. But that doesn't mean: that »L.W.« and »I« mean different things. All it means is that these words are different instruments in our language. Think of words as instruments characterized by their use […].«

[7] See Sellars 1997.

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If the context is known, only a small number of possible explanations for the behavior in question have to be taken into account. Some types of behavior, such as routines, are easier for the observing person to recognize than for the observed persons themselves. External observers can predict the behavior from the outside with high probability because observable postures and gestures hint at how a person will behave—even if it appears that she has not yet made up her mind.

The observation of behavior, expression, and communication allows conclusions to be drawn about what may be going on from the first-person perspective. To be able to talk about own experiences and experiences of other persons, one does not have to rely on allegedly private information. Sellars has developed an argument for how linguistic behavior leads to forms of self-reference without the presupposition of contained private experiences. With the help of a thought experiment, he outlines minimal features of the logic of ordinary language about experiences. In his thought experiment, a Genius Jones proposes that individuals do not only exhibit intelligent behavior when they speak publicly.[8] Rather, overt verbal episodes, i.e., intersubjectively accessible linguistic behavior, are to be understood as the culmination of a process that begins with inner episodes. Linguistic behavior is the expression of thoughts that cannot be observed as such. They should be regarded as unobserved and theoretically assumed inner episodes that provide information about observable behavior of persons.

What is revealed in linguistic behavior allows for more or less reliable inferences to be drawn about not observable thoughts, attitudes, and intentions. The ability to have thoughts is formed in the process of acquiring linguistic behavior, and only then does self-reference unfold. What started as a language of hypotheses and conjectures gradually takes on a reporting role, which in the end incorporates self-referential expressions.[9] Self-referential expressions, though, are themselves sources of fallacies—at least in Western thought. This is especially true of artificial nouns such as »I« or »self.« They suggest

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[8] See Sellars, 1997, 98–109.

[9] See Sellars 1997, 106, 107: »For once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt verbal behavior is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behavior, it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description. (…) *What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role*.«

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that something can be addressed directly as I or self. In fact, these expressions are merely based on fallacious reifications. In linguistic behavior, we can justifiably refer to our attitudes, intentions, and actions and the ones of other persons but not to an ego or self.[10]

3. The Peculiar Grammar of the Expression »I«

Descartes is considered the founder of the theory of self-consciousness. However, he never uses the concept of self-consciousness explicitly and draws on a reflection of Augustine for his famous *existo* and *cogito* argument. Contrary to popular belief, the legacy of Descartes' analysis of self-reference does not consist in revealing introspective certainties about ourselves, but rather in the insight that the language we use to understand ourselves in our various epistemic situations reveals something about the constitution of our consciousness: Whenever I express the sentence *I exist* or conceive in my thinking, it cannot be false. The sentence *I do not exist* is self-refuting as long as it is expressed in the present.[11] Even if I am a finite being with a limited life span, at the moment of the utterance, the sentence *I exist* expresses an indubitable certainty.

In the famous passage from the Second Meditation, Descartes does not apply a method of conceptual analysis, but he nevertheless has a clear understanding of the semantic working and logic of self-reference, and in retrospect we can learn from him not that introspection tells us something about mind and self-consciousness, as is often claimed, but rather that language does.

The phenomenon of self-consciousness unfolds at the edges of the great divide between mind and world, and it does so with problematic reifications—like the »I« or »self.« These reifications are simplistic reactions to the complicated features of self-consciousness. Not long after Descartes introduced the *cogito* into Western philosophy, numerous attempts have been made to escape from the existential isolation that comes with these reifications.

All indexical expressions, like »I« and »now,« implicitly contain a wider context of predication and reflect a variety of structures and perspectives of human experience. A special case is the logic of the

[10] Cf. Sturma 2005, 77–83.

[11] Cf. Descartes 1964, 16–23; Ayer 1956. 44–52.

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expression »I.« It refers to the reflecting or speaking person, but points to nothing. This distinguishes it from the indicators »this« or »here,« which, as it were, select objects from the field of perception. The analytical theory of self-consciousness has taken its starting point from this referential feature to work out the structures of self-consciousness on the basis of the peculiar grammar of the word »I«. It has been demonstrated that »I« is neither a reifying noun nor a proper name nor a designation. Its special position is based on its indexical functions in speech situations. Furthermore, the use of »I« is infallible and not correctable. The speaking person assumes straightforwardly and beyond doubt that the mental state in which she finds herself is her own and not somebody else's.[12] In self-referential expressions of my existence, the pronoun »I« has a constitutive role, but its indicating function is not to be confused with an »I« or »self« as an ontological or metaphysical concept.[13]

Although the analytic philosophy of self-consciousness is primarily oriented towards simple deictic functions of the expression »I,« complicated structures of self-reference turn out as a result of its analyses. When the expression »I« is used in the explanation of the phenomenon of self-consciousness and ceases to have the function of a mere indicator, problems that have accompanied the philosophy of self-consciousness since its beginnings return. It appears that even in analytic philosophy, interpretation, and explanation of the phenomenon of self-consciousness are bound to get trapped in a semantic reification, a vicious circle, or an infinite regress.[14]

Without entering into the intricate problems of the philosophical theory of self-consciousness, it can be stated that the personal and reflexive pronouns used to express self-consciousness have a correlative structure. The sentence »I have self-consciousness« does not stand for the phenomenon of self-awareness because it assumes a kind of ownership that separates the person from her experiences. Rather, the philosophical interpretation of self-consciousness must work with a more complex structure.

According to Immanuel Kant, the self-consciousness of a person is the starting point of her self-relations over time and is therefore present—in whatever form—both in her reflection and in the content

12 There are psychopathological disorders in which this certainty vanishes.
13 Cf. Geach 1957, 117–123; Cf. Austin 1975, 59–66.
14 Cf. Castañeda 1966 and 1999, 61–142.

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of her mental states. It would therefore be wrong to interpret self-consciousness as ownership or as existential isolation. Rather, the self-conscious person inhabits a perspective by which she experiences herself in a natural and social environment. In this indirect way, self-consciousness already contains the spatiotemporal location and practical attitudes of the particular person.[15]

In the light of the contextualization of self-consciousness, the sentence »I exist« takes on a new character. It fulfills the function of an opening to the empirical content of reflection and consciousness. Therefore, regardless of its analytic elements, Kant can transform the cartesian *existo* and *cogito* into the empirical sentence »I exist thinking,«[16] which indicates an activity in space and time and not, as it were, a free-floating and empirically unbound state. The expression »I exist thinking« captures the complicated relationship between the determining and the determined elements in self-consciousness as well as the unavoidable intertwining of existence and thinking in the life of persons. It expresses not only an indubitable self-certainty, but also the spatiotemporal position of the thinking and acting person. Contrary to what Descartes suggests, she experiences her self-certainty not in momentary evidence, but in specific attitudes over time and in relation to what she is not.

Appropriate sentences to express self-consciousness would be: »*I* am aware of *myself*« or »*I* am aware that *I* am in the state *p*.« Being conscious of myself, I have no consciousness of a »self,« but rather of having a certain experience in a specific situation, which stands in an identifiable relation to an event in the spatiotemporal world. As long as she lives, a person takes a specific standpoint in the world with identifiable spatiotemporal coordinates. For this reason, she is intimately familiar with herself in self-consciousness. She does not have to identify herself and cannot be deceived about being self-aware at this very moment. We can consider everything, which exists right now, as contingent from which we could abstract. But we can never take a contingent attitude towards ourselves and our in time moving present. The secret of the peculiar grammar of self-reference is the fact that there is no contingency in our self-awareness.

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15 Cf. Sturma 2018, 143–146.

16 Kant 1999, 456 (B 428).

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4. Indexicality and Non-Indexicality

The peculiar grammar of the expression »I« plays a special role in the system of indexicals and non-indexical expressions. Although persons cannot adopt a contingent attitude toward themselves, they are able to express facts without explicit self-reference and indexicality. Self-reference and indexicality do not belong to a closed domain. They are elements of a linguistic practice that provides access to both intersubjective and objective facts. This practice becomes most evident in the relationship between indexicality and non-indexicality, and, more generally, in the language of time.

Indexicals are the basis of spatiotemporal orientation. They provide information not only about the internal structure of temporal relations, but also about the conditions of experiential states as a whole. In this respect, indexicality turns out to be constitutive of both the epistemic *and* the social attitudes of persons because they reciprocally imply the subjectivity of experience. Persons know that for the indexicals they use from the perspective of first-person singular, there are corresponding expressions in the perspectives of the second-person and third-person singular and plural. Indexicals mark the physical and temporal position of a person. Subjectively, she experiences her personal identity over time as a continuous demarcation between her mind and the world,[17] and existence initially means only being present at a certain time in an objective place.[18]

In their use, indexicals depend on situations of perception and predication that are identifiable in their spatiotemporal coordinates. Indexicals—like explicit self-reference—say something about the process of experiences and its semantic content. Since transformations from indexicality into non-indexicality are epistemic extensions in which the experiential perspective is methodically excluded, indexical reference does not appear on the syntactic surface of non-indexical sentences. Transformations are only possible in the case of complementary relations between subjective and objective localizations. Substitutions of subjective expressions in objective expressions cannot be carried out in a semantically appropriate way if they are depen-

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17 Cf. Castañeda 1999, 180–203. [The Self and the I-Guises].

18 Cf. Tugendhat 1975, 28: »[A]lthough time and space are equally essential for the identification of the thing, the existence of the thing is essentially temporal; the limits within which it exists are dates, not places. For an extended thing *to be* thus means to be present *somewhere* in space during a *certain* time.«

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dent on the experiential perspective of persons. The sentence *I am aware of being in a hopeless situation* differs in its meaning from the sentence *A person is aware of being in a hopeless situation*. The latter sentence can refer to both me and another person, but the emotional state changes dramatically in the case of the first-person perspective.

With the indexical representation of the experiential perspective, asymmetries arise which no longer allow transformations without loss of semantic content. Perspectives are essential for every process of experience. Animals also perceive their environment from a spatiotemporally identifiable position that is, as it were, the anchor of their perceptual field. Different from other life-forms, the perceptual field of persons is formed by their linguistic behavior.

The distinctive perspective of human experience is revealed in the structures of indexicality. Human experience unfolds in a space of semantic options shaped by spatial and temporal perspectives. They are constitutive of communication and interpersonal understanding. In states of understanding and self-understanding, persons orient themselves by means of indexical references to the corresponding communicative or experiential context.[19]

Regardless of the unavoidable experiential perspective and the non-contingency of self-reference, a person is able to formulate meaningful sentences that are not dependent on self-referential contexts for their meaning and validity. By way of her knowledge and productive imagination, she can move in dimensions that have no relation to possible experience and construct meaningful sentences beyond the limits of comprehensible temporal understanding—for example: »Four billion years ago there was no life on earth.« Strangely enough, such sentences are quite difficult to formulate without any time coordinates. One could say, at the expense of temporal precision, that there was no life on earth before the formation of the asteroid belt. However, it is obvious that a sentence likes this is semantically dependent on the assumption of a human perspective on the cosmos. These difficulties of »de-indexicalization« suggest that non-indexical sentences must be experientially anchored in some form. In the case of the sentence »There was a period of time in which there was no life on earth,« it must be presupposed that we are in our solar system and that we are talking about *our* past.

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[19] Cf. Gale 1964, 103/104; Bar-Hillel 1954, 368: »We see that effective communication by means of indexical sentences requires that the recipient should know the pragmatic context of the production of the indexical sentence-tokens.«

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Language is permeated by a system of deictic expressions, by which persons can refer to one and the same object with different pronouns at different times and places. This system is the manifestation of the irreducible interrelation of subjective localizations and objective localizations in space and time.[20] The internal connection between self-consciousness and time is particularly evident in the functions of personnel pronouns. Persons using the expression »I« are already aware that they are addressed by other persons from the second-person and third-person perspective in the same way as they themselves address other persons in the second-person and third-person perspective. In the case of the use of the expression »now,« persons know that the present event is addressed at other times with »earlier« or »later,« respectively.

In communicative situations, indexical functions are mainly carried out by personal, spatial and temporal pronouns. Nevertheless, expressions like »I,« »here,« and »now« do not identify anything. They only indicate a position in space and time or in the communicative situation. They share the epistemic and linguistic context-dependencies, but their respective indexical functions show remarkable differences. Spatial indicators are less unambiguous compared to temporal and personal indicators, and the expression »now« has a recognizably more restricted function than other temporal or spatial indicators.

Like the expression »I,« the expression »now« is subject to linguistic constraints that leave little room for modified uses. Whom I address with »you« or another personal pronoun is just as open to individual choice as the demonstrative identification of objects by »there,« »this« or the like. This is true to a limited extent even for the expression »here.« However, this flexibility is missing when using the expressions »I« and »now« in direct speech. This parallelism of »I« and »now« indicates the special relation between self-consciousness and time.

Within the system of indexical references, the expressions »I« and »now« occupy a special position because they are fundamental to any form of predication. But perceptions and predications only happen with indexicality *and* reference to identifiable objects or events. Persons refer to the same object through a system of indicators at different times and places by using corresponding expressions such as »now,«

20 Cf. Strawson 1959, 15–58.

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»then,« »here,« »there,« »you,« »they,« or »we.« This is only possible, when the subjective indexicalizations find support in objective localizations.

Personal and temporal indicators carry specific time relations. It is the linguistic function of the expressions »I« and »now« is to express immediacy. But considerable difficulties arise in trying to decipher this simple process in everyday language. While suggested by the usages of »I« and »now,« it is not possible to express immediacy precisely due to the discursive constitution of language. The sentence *the expression »I« refers to the one who is speaking now* has no meaning in the strict sense: »Now« is not now anymore, and »I« merely indicates a position in the speech act.

The relation between the expressions »I« and »the one who speaks now« remains unclear—at least in the sense that they do not share the same time segment. Such considerations may seem sophistical, but they nevertheless reveal a special feature of human language: Language talks about immediacy by transcending it. In semantic terms, the immediate present is an abstraction. Self-consciousness can only unfold in time.

A person who says »now« finds herself already at different instants of time. Someone who understands the language of time is able to change the course of things in a very specific way. In this sense, the use of the expressions »I,« »now« and »here« clearly shows extensions of reality. How far the extension of the present goes depends on the state of attention and the normative potential of the respective practical attitudes.

5. The Language of Time

The ontological status of the human life-form is expressed not only in the linguistic manifestations of self-reference, indexicality, and non-indexicality, but also in the semantics of time. The language of time is primarily defined by tensed language, temporal adverbs, and prepositions. A time-dependent proposition makes a temporal statement for a particular moment in time, by which the statement is true only then and at no other time. It is a semantic oddity that temporal determinations, as such, are not without reference, but do not refer to something in the sense of events or objects in space and time. The unclear ontological status of temporal expressions is by no means

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mysterious. While it must be admitted that a concise conceptual understanding runs into a variety of difficulties, we can deal reliably with time in everyday language.[21]

Persons experience time in two ways: as a passage from the future through the present into the past, and as a succession of earlier, simultaneous, and later events. For this distinction, John McTaggart coined the expressions *A*-series and *B*-series,[22] which are still applied in the philosophy of the time, and it is to this day one of the greatest challenges of the theory of time to understand the reality of time and the asymmetric relation between the *A*-series and the *B*-series.[23]

The time relations of the *A*-series are undoubtedly dependent on personal attitudes. When a person regrets something because she made decisions and performed actions in the past that turned out to be wrong, she makes, so to speak, moves through the space of reasons *within* her subjective framework of epistemic and practical attitudes. But this does not mean, even from the personal standpoint, that the *A*-series is independent of the *B*-series or that the *A*-series has priority

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21 Cf. Augustinus 2016, 238: »[Q]uid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio […].« Augustine does not claim that time must be considered an eternal mystery, as is often implied. He merely draws attention to the fact that difficulties arise in explaining the phenomenon of time.«

22 Cf. McTaggart 1927, 9–10: »Positions in time, as time appears to us *prima facie*, are distinguished in two ways. Each position is Earlier than some and Later than some of the other positions. To constitute such a series there is required a transitive asymmetrical relation, and a collection of terms such that, of any two of them, either the first is in this relation to the second, or the second is in this relation to the first. […] In the second place, each position is either Past, Present, or Future. The distinctions of the former class are permanent, while those of the latter are not. If *M* is ever earlier than *N*, it is always earlier. But an event, which is now present, was future, and will be past. […] For the sake of brevity I shall give the name of the *A* series to that series of positions which runs from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present to the near future and the far future, or conversely. The series of positions which runs from earlier to later, or conversely, I shall call the *B* series.« Cf. Prosser 2016, 2–21.

23 For McTaggart, the asymmetrical relationship between *A*-series and *B*-series has been a clear indication for the unreality of time; cf. McTaggart 1927, 10: »Since distinctions of the first class [*B*-series] are permanent, it might be thought more objective, and more essential to the nature of time than those of the second class [*A*-series]. I believe, however, that this would be a mistake, and that the distinction of past, present and future is as *essential* to time as the distinction of earlier and later, while in a certain sense, as we shall see, it may be regarded as more *fundamental* than the distinction of earlier and later. And it is because the distinctions of past, present and future seem to me to be essential for time, that I regard time as unreal.«

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over the *B*-series. As we have seen, the *A*-series opens with the subjective perspective of a person. This fact is linguistically reflected in the special meaning of indexical expressions, in which the respective perceptual and predication situations of persons are manifested. But this opening takes place under the ontological conditions of the *B*-series. Persons establish their point of view in the world of events they share with other persons and living beings.

The question can be raised whether a *B*-series can exist at all without persons or other life-forms that experience temporal sequences. Even animals traverse the *A*-series in the *B*-series, though, without showing explicit self-consciousness or a language of time. It can be considered whether the local and temporal expressions in play can be replaced by elements of the *B*-series and its spatial equivalents, such as »closer than« or »further than.« Such replacements would result in even more artificial expressions, which are no longer of any use for the analysis of the indexical structures of human consciousness. The implicit indexical dependence of time-independent expressions must not be overestimated. It is merely an indication of the special epistemic situation of persons and can by no means be the reason for the assumption of an independence of the *A*-series from the *B*-series.

The scope of the language of time is demonstrated in the large amount of timeless and time-independent expressions whose meaning does not depend on explicit references to subjective perspectives. Whereas time-dependent propositions articulate temporal relations for a particular moment in time, and are true only in this respect, time-independent propositions are formulated, as it were, from nowhere. These intersubjective and objective components of the language of time play a significant role in our everyday communication and understanding.

It is the distinguishing quality of human language that it is capable of expressing situation-independent and time-independent propositions like *x is F*. The meaning of sentences with this formal structure is based on the elimination of temporal contexts: An object is in a timeless manner said to possess the property *F*. The transformation carried out in this process has been interpreted as an indication of the factual and methodological primacy of the *B*-series over the *A*-series. This conclusion is overhasty. Statements of the type *x is F* are indications of specific properties of propositional attitudes, which are unrecognizable in the transitions from time-dependent to timeless

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statements. The loss of explicit linguistic representation is by no means a blind spot. To ignore this fact leads to the fallacy of mistaking linguistic peculiarities for ontological facts.

Time-dependent assertions have to be transferred into the dimension of *B*-relations to be able to abstract from subjective standpoints and to proceed to timeless assertions. Timeless descriptions are sentences in Wittgenstein's »book of the world« which records all physical properties and events of the world but leave untouched the internal structure of the experiential perspective of the one who can read this book at least in parts.[24] The first-person perspective is, in no significant sense, part of the world the book describes, and this is as true for the »omniscient person« as for any other. But this does not take us away from the fact that the thought experiment of the book of the world can only be conceived on the basis of the epistemic situation of the human life-form. The transition to timeless sentences takes place with the help of abstractions from the specific context of the speech act and is semantically supported by the propositional content of the respective statement. However, the abstraction is justified only if the context of the speech act is negligible with regard to its propositional content. The pages from the »book of the world« do not have the function of saying anything about the experiential situation of self-awareness. Their constructive profit excludes that the »book of the world« can stand in for reality as a whole. Besides, it is unclear what place such a book could have in the world at all, especially since it cannot contain itself by design.

Different ways of observing and exploring runs neither into ontological nor epistemological difficulties. But one must take the possibility into account that the language of the *A*-series, irrespective of its constitutive function in propositional attitudes, presupposes the objectivity of the *B*-series. The epistemological function of the *A*-series does not support the view that it could be sufficient for adequately constituting human cognition. Such an assumption would amount to the fallacy of tacitly inferring from an epistemological argument for the irreducibility of the *A*-series in human conscious-

[24] Siehe Wittgenstein 1965, 6: »Suppose one of you were an omnisicent person and therefore knew all the movements of all bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world.«

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ness the claim that time-consciousness finds its foundation only in itself.

The epistemic situation of the human life-form does not stand for itself but depends on ontological structures that are accessible for cognitive consciousness. The relations of the *B*-series always, though largely unnoticed, have an influence on the semantical and syntactical characteristics of the space of reasons and linguistic behavior. From an epistemic point of view, a person leads her life where the *A*-series and the *B*-series converge. Her mental activities move through the *A*-series, and, by virtue of her epistemic and practical capabilities, she is in position to intervene in the world of events whose relations are reproduced in the *B*-series.

The presence of a person is a segment of the path from future to past, along which her later action *b* as event *B* follows to her earlier action *a* as event *A* for all times. Persons lead their life in the perspective of the *A*-series and are able to react practically to objective events, which proceed in the sequence *earlier—at the same time—later*. The convergence of the *A*-series and the *B*-series indicates that the life of persons is subject to different orders and regularities in one and the same ontological space.

The naturalistic argument of the unity of reality is not opposed to presuppositions of the irreducibility of the subjective perspective in the life of persons. My present wanders, as long as I live, through the *B*-series and constantly creates new dimensions of past and future. When I pass away, my *A*-series collapses. With the *B*-series, we enter a world in which experiential perspectives emerge and fade away. Lest we forget, time begins when someone relates processes to each other, such as the movement of the sun with the hand of a sundial.

6. Time and Self-Consciousness in Action

Persons live in a world that is structured by the relations of succession and simultaneity, and they perceive them through the temporal relations of future, present, and past. The *A*-series represents the *B*-series in the mode of self-referential consciousness. This way, structures of the world relate to structures of conscious finitude in the sense of being aware of its own limited existence. Persons, as manifestations of conscious finitude, live in a world of irreversible change. They are at the origin of the *B*-series, which becomes the ontological refe-

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rence for the *A*-series. The passage from the future to the present and the past is nothing other than the conscious expression of irreversible changes. Accordingly, temporal divisions have a cognitive function regarding the identification of events, objects, and individuals that undergo irreversible change.

The relation between the *A*-series and the *B*-series determines the conduct of the life of persons. This phenomenon is evident in the case of time-independent attitudes. Persons have to live their lives over time, and their actions require them to be able to interpret particular temporal positions in their evaluation and conduct. They must gain an understanding of how they can and should deal with their past and future in the respective present. Such complicated attitudes can only be implemented if reasons for action are not completely situation-dependent. Only then can an adequate practical understanding that the present is only an elusive moment in the life of persons be acquired.

In normative terms, time-independent attitudes are relevant because they are the source of reasons for action and prudential considerations that are valid not only for a specific moment in time. A good reason for action cannot be found solely in the perspective of the immediate present. Reasons, which are not directly dependent on a specific situation, provide a vision of how a situation or an event may take shape in the future and will present itself in retrospect. The expansion of the present through time-independent evaluations generates reasons that are not only applicable to the present; they are expressions of practical continuities in time and over time.

Because people live their lives in the present, a bias towards the present can hardly be avoided.[25] An epistemic as well as practical response to the bias toward the present is the extension of the present. Although a person always acts only in the present, it would be a dramatic restriction of the potential of personal life if she were to limit her reflections and actions to the present. The extension of the present demonstrates the fact that persons have the capacity to adopt a reflective attitude towards the present moment and to conceive it from the outset as one among other temporal positions.

Unlike spatiotemporal objects, persons can deliberately and intelligibly relate to their past and future. Not only do they emerge and pass away in time, as everything that exists, but they can actively

[25] Cf. Parfit 1986, 158–193.

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establish epistemic and practical relations to time and over time. Time consciousness is the orientation toward past and future in the present, and it opens up the possibility of alternatives and thereby enriches one's present experience with an awareness of other possible worlds. As persons, in the course of the temporal transitions of their lives, transcend immediacy and contingency, at least in part, through actions over time, they break the chain of external constraints. While this does not mean that they live in a self-determined world, they can at least initiate actions as events that can be traced back to reasons. In the extended present, the past and the future do not appear as a sea of chance, but as a range of options in which certain actions were realized or refrained from or are to be realized or refrained from on the basis of reasons.

Persons need by no means judge reasons for action only according to their proximity to the present.[26] Rather, it belongs to the inherent possibilities of their conduct not to have to reject reasons for past action because they contradict immediate needs or desires. They are able to exceed the present following the arrow of time. Leading the life *as* a person can only come about through reasons for action, which, in their internal structure, are not wholly dependent on the motivational situation of the present moment. The meaning and impact of reasons for action unfolds because they apply to more than one moment in time, and in this sense, they represent values that are time-independent.

Since the immediate present does not necessarily override time-independent reasons for action, persons are able to establish continuities over time. At most, the degree to which continuities extend across time may be debatable. Therefore, it has to be asked whether the popular maxim *carpe diem*, which clearly expresses a bias towards the present, is useful from a practical point of view.

The maxim *carpe diem* implies the possibility of continuities over time, only to warn explicitly against it: while it is an option for action, it deprives people of the benefits of the present. If the warning is supposed to suggest that every moment is to be considered only as if it could be the last one, it falls short in terms of leading the life of a *person*, i.e., living self-aware over time. Persons are at every stage of

[26] Cf. Rawls 1971, 420: »We are to see our life as one whole, the activities of one rational subject spread out in time. Mere temporal position, or distance from the present, is not a reason for favoring one moment over another.«

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their lives more than an ensemble of centerless and random attitudes and intentions.

From the perspective of extended presence, the existentially short-sighted idea of permanently existing as the last moment vanishes, for even the last moment of a life can still contain visions of possible worlds. As the finitude of the individual person is only empirically, but not ideally the last word, persons should act as if the next moment could never be the last. Otherwise, the absurd situation would arise in which people would permanently have to experience the unpleasant surprise of being still alive. Such a case is perhaps conceivable as an extreme experience which can occur in or after life-threatening events, but in everyday situations it only generates absurdities and is not at all suitable for expressing the authentic view of a self-aware person.

Due to the arrow of time, it is the future which has a practical priority over the present and the past. We must operate on the assumption of an asymmetrical relationship between the past and the future in the present. Since the arrow of time already points into the future, persons cannot form an idea of the present without an image of the future, no matter how narrowly defined. At any point in her life, it is open to a person to think far beyond the probable time of her death and to feel committed to a world which she will no longer inhabit as a physically present person. Without denying that persons exist only for a very limited time and under conditions of external constraints, finitude and continuity can be reconciled with a conception of self-determination as self-extension that implies that there is enough time to make the realization of authentic continuities over time worthwhile. In the lives of persons, it is not contingency and blind chance that coincide, but finitude and continuity.

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