CHAPTER IV

PERSONHOOD AND HUMAN AGENCY
In the earlier chapters, an attempt was made to suggest that the notions of "person", "self" and "agent" are central to the concept of action in the sense that ascriptions of beliefs, values, intentions and responsibility presuppose self-conscious beings — beings who are capable of recognising and understanding the implications of such ascriptions and consequently affirming or denying them. It was also suggested that recognising an individual as a person is not merely a matter of belief or opinion but also of adopting a particular attitude towards the individual under reference. It may be pointed out that the concept of 'person' is not simply a descriptive concept for attributing personhood involves seeing the bearer as having certain rights and obligations and also values which are realised by him in and through his activities.

Philosophers and social scientists have discussed the nature of person, self and agency in different idioms but they have all been concerned with the questions such as "what is a person?" "what are the criteria of personal identity?" "In what sense person can be said to lose or acquire a sense of identity?" "what unites the
different states of the same "person" or "self"? "How is self-knowledge possible?" "Are agents causes of their actions?" etc. These questions are some of the questions which have drawn the attention of both philosophers and social scientists to consider the problems involved in identification and individuation of persons and selves and agents.

"What is a person?" is a question that has puzzled the modern philosophers in the western tradition right from the times of Descartes. Traditionally the question was taken as a demand for stating the essential characteristics by which a line could be drawn between persons and non-persons. The search for essences is, a hangover of Platonic Metaphysics, a futile enterprise in that it presumes that there is some kind of substance which remains unchanged, and it is in terms of such a substance that a definition of person has to be provided. However, most of the contemporary philosophers regard the whole enterprise of looking for essences or essential attributes as misconceived. Yet most philosophers tend to characterise persons as the sort of beings who can

1 While analytical philosophers hold the search for essences as an outcome of a misunderstanding of the nature of language and its relation to the world; existentialist philosophers like Sartre would deny that person or self has any essence.
think, remember, believe, imagine, perceive, feel, wish, hope, want, choose, intend and decide etc.\(^2\) Philosophical discussions on the nature of personhood are conducted in a manner which tends to create an impression that it is possible to grasp notions like 'consciousness', 'thinking' and 'p-predicates' etc. without making any reference to the notion of a 'human being'.

It is a truism that even though an infant is regarded as a potential person, one is not born as a person; from a biological organism one acquires the status of a person through the process of socialisation by which one becomes aware of one's rights and obligations.

\(^2\)For example, According to Locke, "person stands for a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself."

According to Strawson, "The concept of a person is not to be analysed as that of an animated body or of an embodied anima. This is not to say that the concept of a pure individual consciousness might not have a logically secondary existence, if one think or finds it desirable. We speak of a dead person -- a body -- and in the same secondary way we might at least think of a disembodied person."

Strawson, P.F., Individuals, p. 103.

Though Strawson seems to be arguing against a cartesian view of personhood, his definition of person shows a clear influence of the dualistic metaphysics of Descartes. "What I mean by the concept of a person is the concept of a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness; and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation etc. are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type." Ibid., pp. 101-102.
within the community in which one participates as a member. The process of becoming a person does not eradicate the fact that one is a natural being. Human beings are biological organisms and as physical objects continue to be governed by natural laws in spite of their transcendence from a state of nature into a state of culture. The interpersonal-relationships that human beings enter are a manifestation of their attitude which affirms their personhood as distinct from their being biological organisms or physical objects.

A just-born child is exposed not only to the physical world but also to a complex of symbols, signs and gestures which are the quintessence of a culture. The child's early interaction with others consists of non-verbal signals such as head-nods, eye-movements, tones

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3. The embodied person has a sense of being flesh and blood and bones, of being biologically alive and real; he knows himself to be substantial. To the extent that he is thoroughly in his body, he is likely to have a sense of personal continuity in time. He will experience himself as subject to the dangers that threaten his body, the dangers of attack, mutilation, disease, decay and death. He is implicated in bodily desire, and the gratifications and frustrations of the body. The individual has as his starting-point an experience of his body as a base from which he can be a person with other human beings.

Leing, M.D., The Divided Self, p. 67.
of voice, facial expressions and mono-syllables which are expressions of attitudes, emotions, attentiveness, feedback etc. Here it is not a matter of adjusting to readymade patterns of behaviour but of assimilating modes of life-activity which presuppose the capacity to endow meanings to one's surroundings and one's place in them. e.g. Mother brings some interesting thing to the notice of the child by pointing her finger towards it, and soon the child learns to point the object by his finger and bring it to the notice of the mother. Here, knowledge for the child is not simply 'a taking notice of', but an interpretation of the symbol of finger-pointing. Even the infant, who has become naughty enough to utter a habitual cry in order to draw the attention of the mother, has entered the precincts of symbolism from a pure sign-situation. If one carefully observes the behaviour of a growing child in order to trace the growth of his consciousness, one will find that the beginning of the child's knowledge cannot be separated from his beginning to understand a symbol, i.e. learning how to use it, be it a verbal symbol or a non-verbal one. It is needless to emphasise that an interpretation of a symbol involves a tacit capacity for its application. The child comes to learn that gestures have meaning only when he comes to learn that similar gestures, whenever applied by him, arouse similar responses in others.
It can be shown that there is a close relationship between perception, imagination and conceptual abilities. The empiricist philosophers found it difficult to account for knowledge, for they concentrated exclusively on "pure" sense-impressions. A sense-impression cannot, by itself, tell us that the object of my sense-perception is a table. To know that I am seeking a table is to subsume the impression under a concept. The suggestion of a "pure" unconceptualised sense-impression is unintelligible.

"The deepest mistake in empiricist theories of perception, descending from Berkeley and Hume, has been the representation of human beings as passive observers receiving impressions from 'outside' of the mind, where the 'outside' includes their own bodies."

Hampshire, Stuart, Thought and Action, p. 47.

Hampshire criticises the empiricists also for ignoring the interdependence of action and observation. The tradition which thought of persons primarily as observers ignored that perceptual experience is structured by the conceptual scheme which, as persons, we apply to the world. In another passage, Hampshire points out: "If one tries to suppose, following Hume, a form of experience that consists simply of a succession of impressions and ideas, one will be compelled to ask whether the subject can control it will some of his impressions and ideas. If he cannot, how will he appear as a subject, a mind, a person at all? If he can, must he not somehow distinguish the act of direction and control, which could not itself be counted as one more impression, or kind of impression, among the others?"

Ibid., p. 51.
On the other hand, some rationalist philosophers went to the other extreme of concentrating only on "pure" thoughts or concepts. But "pure" concepts divorced from the deliverances of the senses are as incoherent as "pure" sense-impressions which are not subsumed under concepts. Kant's critique was directed against such tendencies in epistemology when he pointed out that "thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." what the dogmatic empiricist and the dogmatic rationalist ignore is that there is a continuum between simply perceiving a certain situation, and interpreting it. To put it in other words, there is no sharp line that can be drawn between a plain (brute) fact and a situation which has been interpreted. Interpretation involves seeing, recognising, or supplying the instantiation of criteria, which presupposes a competent grasp of the respective concepts. The conceptual abilities are required not only for organisation of sense-impressions; certain emotions can be experienced only by those who

5 In *Philosophical Investigations* (pp. 193-206), Wittgenstein has pointed out that we can see the same illustration (duck-rabbit, picture-object) in different ways. He says "so we interpret it, and see it as we interpret it." (Ibid., p. 193). In the same context, Wittgenstein further points out that "it is only if someone can do, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, that it makes sense to say he has had this experience." (Ibid., p. 209).
have pre-requisite linguistic abilities. Fear of bankruptcy or of being deserted by one's wife can be emotions vivid and strong enough to lead to suicide. Yet it would be impossible to feel such a fear without an adequate grasp of the complex ramifications of a socio-cultural-economic set-up, and without having learned to master a language which incorporates the values and conventions of a society.  

The process of formation of an individual's conscience is mediated through culture which acts as a pre-requisite for its growth. For the individual, culture appears immediately as a web of meanings which have been reified into an objective reality existing independently of him. This reification leads to a fallacious idea that society provides an external environment to which man has

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6 "One must in philosophy consider human beings simultaneously as observers and as agents and as language-users. If one considers the theory of mind and ethics separately, both are apt to be falsified. The forms of our language are largely determined by our practical interests as social beings, and our practical interests, the goals of action are limited by our powers of communication and description. Within language as we know it, a limit is set to the possibility of varying the form of language, and of varying the ways in which we think about our own actions, by our nature as perceiving and thinking beings who are also intentional agents moving among other things."

Hampshire, Stuart, op. cit., p. 67.
to adapt himself in order to survive just as the animal must adapt itself to its natural environment. Human personality, according to this view, is shaped by successes or failures of this adaptation. But what is ignored is the fact that in society human beings find not only the external conditions to which they respond but also that these very conditions provide grounds for the alternative possibilities in and through which each individual forms his purposes and projects. The identity of a human being is certainly grounded in the socio-cultural context yet he evolves into a person in terms of the future projects toward which he orients his capacities, choices and decisions. In fact, a person conceives his identity even in terms of projects which are yet to be realized. Such projects, nevertheless, are not arbitrary figments of fancy but are informed by one's past activities and one's reckonings (in the present) with that which is given to the individual in terms of his interactions with others.

7 Behaviorists like Watson, Hull and Skinner see human personality as nothing but the history of contingencies of reinforcements of responses made by the human organism in response to the environmental stimuli that are presented to it in the process of the organism's adaptation to the environment.

8 We cannot give an undistorted account of a 'person' without giving an account of his relation with others. Even an account of one person cannot afford to forget that each person is always acting upon others.
The formation of projects depends upon the capacity to conceptualise in the sense that alternative future courses of action can be envisaged only by a being who has linguistic skills. It is only within the realm of language and culture that one comes to realise one's native potentialities of entering into interpersonal relationships, and playing different roles which presuppose reciprocal responsiveness for they are constitutive of a set of expectations within which one finds oneself obliged to act in specific ways. All the roles that one performs are not of one's choosing. The very fact that one is born in a particular family, in a particular society and in a particular age determines the original identity of the individual and the rules that he would be expected to perform in his early life. In the

and acted upon by others. The others are these also. No one acts or experiences in a vacuum. The person whom we describe, and over whom we theorise, is not the only agent in his 'world'. How he perceives and acts towards the others, how they perceive and act towards him, how he perceives them as perceiving him, how they perceive him as perceiving them, are all aspects of the 'situation'. They are all pertinent to understanding one person's participation in it.

Leach, E.D., Self and Others, p. 82.

"Every relationship implies a definition of self by other and other by self. This complimentarity can be central or peripheral, have greater or less dynamic significance at different periods of one's life...."
performance of these roles, persons interpret and reinterpret their situation and their role in them; and may feel a sense of achievement, failure, anxiety, guilty, fear, threat, hostility, acceptance, affection depending upon their perception of the situation. The perceptions and interpretations (which generate these feelings) are also occasions for mystifications of social situations for we do not live in a world of unambiguous identities and definitions, needs and fears, hopes and disillusionments. The opacity of consciousness provides for unlimited occasions to human beings to deceive themselves to the extent of taking their own lies or falsehoods for truths. Nevertheless, an acknowledgement

other people become a sort of identity-kit, whereby one can piece together a picture of oneself. One recognizes oneself in that old smile of recognition from that old friend."

Laing, R.D., Self and Others, pp. 86-87.

10 "Interpersonal life is conducted in a nexus of persons, in which each person is guessing, assuming, inferring, believing, trusting or suspecting generally being happy or tormented by his phantasy of the others' experience, motives and intentions. And one has phantasies not only about what the other himself experiences and intends, but also about his phantasies about one's own experience and intentions, and about his phantasies about one's phantasies about his phantasies about one's experience, etc. There could be no greater mistake to suppose that these issues are mere 'theoretical' complexities, of little practical relevance. There are some people who conduct their lives at several phantasy steps away from their own immediate experience or their own intentions. Family interactions are often dominated by these issues."

Laing, R.D., Ibid., p. 174.
of the possibilities of being deceived or deceiving others should not lead one to go in for a total skepticism regarding the genuineness of the avowals of emotions, intentions, beliefs and values by others as well as of one's own:

"A refusal to trust... avowals, would produce an inability to respond to others, for we would not know what to respond, and our beliefs that inform our emotions would not specify adequate intentional objects for our emotions. We have to trust one another at this basic level or be paralysed in our humanity. This is not a choice."11

11 MacIntyre, Alasdair C., 'Behaviour, Belief And Emotion' in Interpretations of Life And Mind, Edited by Marjorie Grene, p. 97.

Similar views have been expressed by Sydney Shoemaker in this regard. Referring to Wittgenstein's notion of a "form of life", Shoemaker points out:

"It is, I should like to say, part of our "form of life", to use Wittgenstein's expression, that we accept what other persons say at face value, without normally raising or even considering the question whether they understand the meanings of the expression they utter, or whether their apparent testimony is really testimony.... We regard a person who is talking, not as making sounds from which, knowing the circumstances in which such sounds have been uttered in the past, we can make certain inductive inferences, but as saying something. We regard what he says as having meaning, not simply in the sense in which a barometer reading has meaning, i.e., as indicating that something has happened, is happening, or is about to happen, but as expressing what he means. It would be misleading to describe it as a belief on our part, the belief that people who use the words we use generally mean by them what we mean by them. It is rather a matter of attitude, of the way in which we respond to a person who is talking.... If this attitude were one of belief, we could inquire into the grounds of
If we try to understand the nature of personhood from our own experience, we may succeed in getting as near as we can to what is meant when we speak and think of ourselves as persons. We notice that anyone who recognises himself (or another) as a person also recognises himself (or another) as having or being a self. To be a self, one must be an 'agent', but 'selves' also have receptive or passive elements to which the term 'agent' does not do full justice. We are agents, spectators and patients simultaneously. The characteristics that we possess are so complex and diverse that it is not possible to give an exact and precise description of what it is to be a person. This point has been made very well by Danto in a related context:

"I would think a characterisation of the self correct which situated it between part of the world, taken as semantical vehicle (language), and part of the world taken as conferring semantical value on that, with the self an agent whose distinctive activity consisted in relating the two. The self then would be at right angles both to language and the world, and hence to whatever divisions might have to be distinguished within the world such as, for example, the mental and the material. As a self, which applies semantical vehicles to the world, I am as distinct from whatever mental contents I apply these to as I am from any the belief. But this is just what we do not do."

material content, supposing that distinction ultimate. It may well be that those part of the world which are to be counted mental are constituted through the fact that one self at most can denote them, and hence they are related to that self in a unique and intimate fashion. Yet the relationship, however, intimate it may be, does not render the contents so denoted more immediate than anything else the self may denote by means of a semantical vehicle. Even if the only things we experience are in some sense mental contents, we should have to distinguish the relations holding amongst them from the relationship between them and the self, which applies semantical vehicles to them; and these relationships are sufficiently distinct that it would be awkward to characterise both as mental. Philosophers, like everyone else, find it easiest to think in descriptive terms, and to define as much as possible in descriptive terms. But the self's activities must be at least partially characterised in semantic terms. Hence there is a crucial and traditionally frustrating sense in which the self cannot be described.

we shall, therefore, consider different aspects of the self without claiming that there is some object which is referred to by the term 'self'. In our attempt to understand the nature of 'selfhood', within the human content, we find that by self we understand a source of activities, an author of actions, plans, chains of thought, projections and speculations. Though it is logically possible to imagine a self which was merely a spectator of events but such a self would be very different from

a human 'self'. The human being is not just to be a source of activities but also to be that which endures in time. Our various perceptions, emotions, beliefs and activities are lived by us as successive phases and manifestations of that which persists in time, though it is not possible for us to point to this persistent something. Its continuity is lived and not precisely describable. Yet this continuity acts not merely as a backdrop to our emotions, thoughts and actions; without the awareness of this continuity there could be no intending, thinking or acting. All cognition involves a subject which is conscious of itself, and the self of which we are conscious in our cognitions is regarded as identical with itself (throughout) in spite of diverse cognitions.

13"We do not only attribute to ourselves sense-perceptions of things other than ourselves, and action and intention. We attribute to ourselves physical characteristics of a kind shared by other basic particulars of our conceptual scheme; that is to say, we have material bodies. We attribute to ourselves thoughts and feelings, and pains and pleasures, which we also attribute to others, and we think of ourselves as having transactions with others, as influencing and being influenced by them."

Strawson, P.F., *Ansikte*, p. 64.
Another important aspect of personhood is that, in seeing ourselves as persons, we hold ourselves as autonomous in making effective choices. We suppose, implicitly, that our choices determine the future course of our actions, and that, until we make a choice our future is indeterminate. We cannot believe otherwise for if our future is already determined then either our choices are merely an epiphenomenon without having anything to do with our actions, or our choices were antecedently determined even before we made them, and thus we had no hand in the making of our choices.

If what has been said above is correct, then to regard oneself as a person is to hold oneself to be autonomous in making one's choices; to regard oneself as capable of changing and developing oneself. Perhaps, most of us do view ourselves in this manner. If this

*People who experience themselves as automata, as robots, as bits of machinery, or even as animals... are rightly regarded as crazy. Yet why do we not regard a theory that seeks to transmute persons into automata or animals as equally crazy? The experience of oneself and others as persons is primary and self-validating. It exists prior to the scientific or philosophical difficulties about how such experience is possible or how it is to be explained."

Laing, R.D., The Divided Self, p. 23.
is a prerequisite for one's being a person then it is required from a human being qua person to treat himself as an end, as a value. Such a characterization of oneself is essentially a normative characterization. It is important to keep in view the fact that human beings are, at least for themselves, members of that unique species whose distinguishing mark is that they are obliged to have values, to exist for values, at least to be capable of values. Human freedom constantly allows every human being to refuse to succumb, even at the risk of his life, a historically given situation or an element thereof. By transforming the sensed world into a universe of symbols and meanings, human beings free themselves from the hold of their immediate environment, and construct, what we call, a human context by relying upon explicit and implicit conventions in their interactions with one another. In this interaction, the role of the body seems to be ambiguous for we cannot regard it as our own creation, and though we use possessive pronouns for referring to the body, it is hardly a possession in the sense in which one's house or books or even one's friends, relatives and children could be said to be one's possessions.

Normally, we do have a sense of continuity of our bodies and their ability to move in the world and yet we are sometimes said to lack a sense of identity.
A lack of a sense of identity is usually understood to mean that one lacks those features which give inner stability and continuity to, what we call, a human mode of living; for instance, we are sometimes uncertain about our own beliefs, feelings and desires; on occasions we are unsure of ourselves. One may also be said to lose one's sense of identity when one may suffer from an attack of amnesia and may just forget who one is. The point is that though bodily-continuity in space and time is a necessary condition for one's identity, the criteria of bodily-continuity is not sufficient to characterise personal-identity for a person is not merely an organism but a cognising and an active/acting, reflective being. To put it in other words, a person must be aware of his bodily continuity and also the continuity of his memories and belief-structures in order to see himself as the same person. Nevertheless, we do not have two separate concepts of personality, one physical and the other ideological, but a single concept of person in which both the elements are fused. Some philosophers have been puzzled over the concordance of the two elements but these are serious questions only for those who assume that beliefs in disembodied after life and science-fiction stories of bodily interchange are true. While it is difficult to argue against such logical possibilities one can also not ignore the cases of split-personalities. Till one comes to
terms with such cases, the problem of personal identity would continue to remain enigmatic. Nevertheless, it may be said that intractable puzzles about personal identity arise only when we start considering the idea of consciousness as separated from, abstracted from, and isolated from the normal human context.

As has been pointed out, a sense of personhood is not there initially at the time when one is born but emerges gradually as one participates in the social and cultural practices of the group. My identity, in the first instance, is conferred on me in the sense that I am told who I am by my parents and peers from whom I learn about my family background and the socio-cultural group to which it belongs. Not only is my identity conferred on me but the very possibilities of transcending this conferred identity are rooted in the socio-cultural milieu to which I belong. Most of the orderliness that I come across as a child is largely formed around the routine activities of others who have already been assimilated into the values and culture of the social group which assigns different roles, responsibilities, obligations and rights on its members.15

15 "I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The
These routine activities indicate, on the part of the participants, a shared understanding of the social context and their place in it. It is by observing and gradually participating in these activities that I come to recognise and understand others, and consequently my relationship with them. A child does not respond to the socialisation process passively for he projects, fantasises and actively responds by way of either accepting or rejecting his interactions with others in his early years. The beliefs that a child imbibes are not merely true or false for him but are action-guiding and enable him to cope with the situations, more or less successfully, in which he is placed. Beliefs not only guide actions but are also being correspondingly revised and added to. In the process of socialisation the child not only becomes aware of his natural abilities but also starts acquiring new abilities through learning, instruction and education.

Reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me.... Language marks the coordinates of my life in society and fills the life with meaningful objects."

Later on new abilities are also acquired by individuals on their own when they creatively explore the possibilities of doing new things. It is relevant to mention here that abilities and opportunities are interconnected in the sense that one could exercise one's abilities only when opportunities for the same are available to the individual, and opportunities could be availed only by those who had the relevant abilities. Thus I cannot sit in a certain examination unless I have fulfilled certain course-requirements; I cannot practice my profession before I have successfully cleared that examination, and so on. There is a tendency to analyse human abilities in terms of dispositions, if being able to speak a language, say English, is taken as a typical example of a human ability,

16. What a man can do in a given situation is, however, only partly conditioned by his abilities. An equally important condition is formed by the opportunities. A child may have learnt how to open a window, but if the windows in the surrounding are already open, it cannot, in that situation open a window. The ability is a generic feature of an agent; the opportunity, again, is an individual feature of a concrete situation.

Every action by any man creates and destroys opportunities for actions — by the agent himself and by other agents."

von Wright, "Determinism And The Study of Man" in Manninen and Tuomela (Ed.), emanina, p. 432.

In this context, it is interesting to observe children repeatedly closing and opening the windows just to make sure to themselves their newly acquired competence.
and brittleness of a glass is taken as an example of a disposition, then following Aristotle, M.H. Ayers and Anthony Kenny, it may be argued that, unlike dispositions,

Aristotle, in his Metaphysics, argued that since rational powers can be exercised at will by the agent, a distinction should be drawn between rational powers and natural powers.

M.H. Ayers, in his refutation of determinism, has maintained that it is not possible to assimilate human 'can' into natural 'can' for "to attribute a general capacity to a person is never to say that in certain circumstances he definitely will do the action, but is to say that in certain circumstances he might do the action, although perhaps he might not, ... it really is impossible to predict simply from the fact that a man is capable of doing an action and also has the opportunity, that he will do it." (pp. 105-106). Ayers also points out that "when we ascribe a power to a thing we are characteristically saying something about its own nature but nothing about the circumstances in which it is placed; if we assert that a man could have done an action we imply not only something about the man himself but also that circumstances are favourable to the action, that there is nothing in them to prevent it." (p. 103)

A similar position has been taken by Anthony Kenny in his article "Human Abilities and Dynamic Modalities" (published in Essays on Explanation and Understanding edited by Kamin and Uemura) in which he argues that "logic of ability cannot be captured in a modal system with a possible world semantics of the kind familiar since the work of Kripke and Hintikka" (p. 49) on the ground that formal rules for ability will not be the same as those for dispositions. Kenny offers a list of ten distinguishable 'can's which 'revel different senses of 'can's uses of 'can' in which different syntactical and semantical rules apply." (p. 46) Maintaining that abilities are something internal to an agent while opportunities are something external, Kenny says that "Abilities and Opportunities are, of course, interconnected, abilities can be exercised only when opportunities for their exercise present themselves, and opportunities can be taken only by those who have the appropriate abilities." (p. 21).
even if all the conditions for the exercise of a human ability were present, it is not necessary that the agent will exercise his ability. When we speak of a glass being brittle, we imply that under specific conditions it must break; but when we speak of a human being to be knowing English language we cannot specify the conditions under which he would be obliged to speak the language. Someone may know English language and may yet take a pledge never to speak it.

Actions are future-oriented in the sense that they are usually performed with a view to realizing that which is not already there, that which is not already the case; to actualise what the agent believes to be possible through his agency. To be an agent, therefore, is to form one's projects in terms of one's beliefs about one's situation and one's capacities and to take steps to realise them. In the execution of one's plans for accomplishing one's projects one is constantly aware that one is not the only agent in the world. There are other agents with whom one interacts either cooperates with them or is in conflict with them or is indifferent to them. One communicates with the others, has expectations from them, anticipates their plans and conduct and attaches significance to them in terms of whether one sees them as one's allies or one's adversaries.
It is a truism to say that one acts to gratify one's needs. But one's needs are not merely biological; there are also needs which are formed and perceived through the socio-cultural context by the individual. As pointed out earlier, the socio-cultural context includes not only real others but also fictive others which are projections of one's phantasies, dreams and imagination. One's articulation of one's needs inhibits or promotes them depending upon the value-predilections of the individuals. In order to gratify one's needs, whether these are biological, emotional, social or intellectual, one has to perform a large number of roles which sometimes make conflicting demands on the agent. One may aspire to be a good mathematician, a sincere friend and an affectionate father at one and the same time\(^\text{18}\) — projects

\(^{18}\) As a member of society man usually holds one or several positions in which he is expected, or sometimes even obliged, to do various things. Some such position a man can be said to hold "by nature", such as the position of a parent; others he holds, e.g. by appointment or by election. But in either case the actions or types of action expected of him are defined by the explicit or implicit rules (laws, customs, conventions) of the society to which he belongs.... Thus a head of state is expected to care for his country's prestige, its power and prosperity. This will make him form intentions and take decisions which, as a 'private citizen', he neither could nor would contemplate. The objects of these intentions form part of what he and others consider his duties."

Van "right, "determinism and the science of Man", in Manninen and Kuusela (ed.), supra cit., p. 429.
which are different in nature and require fulfilment of different conditions for their realisation. The open-ended future allows for the possibility of revision of one's projects in terms of one's actual engagements and the consequences that one encounters following these engagements. An inadequate appreciation of the open-ended character of the future in virtue of the human being's capacity to form new projects for himself has buttressed the traditional definitions of self as non-describable, non-predictable and non-observable. In a way, all descriptions of oneself seem to be inadequate for they tend to limit and foreclose the possibilities which would have been otherwise available. It may be relevant here to make a distinction between formation of projects and their realisation through actions which are contingent upon the individual's capacities, social circumstances and natural conditions. The gap between the two is sometimes so enormous that it is likely to undermine one's sense of freedom and confidence in one's capacities. Consequently how we come to see ourselves and what we come to make of ourselves is related to a considerable extent to a convergence or divergence between the projects that are formed by us and their actualisation which depends upon the conditions which are part of the given. The convergence gives us a sense of achievement whereas a
divergence fester a sense of remorse or regret. The cumulative successes and failures of each generation become a part of the given for the next generation to be internalised by it and to be used for formulating future projects.

It may not be out of place here to point out that in law institutions like 'university', 'corporation', 'governmental agencies' and 'political parties' etc. are regarded as artificial persons. These institutions are recognised as persons in the derivated sense of the term for they can be said to take decisions, plan and formulate policies, provide or restrict opportunities to real human persons. Mandelbaum has pointed out that

"in understanding or explaining an individual's action we must often refer to facts concerning the organisation of the society in which he lives, and that our statements concerning these societal facts are not reducible to a conjunction of statements concerning the actions of individuals." 19


Even if it is correct that statements about societal facts cannot be reduced to statements concerning the beliefs, attitudes and actions of individuals; it cannot be said that social facts are similar to natural facts, as MacIntyre has pointed out "attitudes to and beliefs about institutions may sometimes be purely external phenomena; that is, the institution or the
Nevertheless, it could not be wrong to hold that specific social institutions continue to exist only till a large number of persons continue to adhere or accept the norms prevalent in a society. Though it is not easy to change the institutions yet it would be wrong to hold that they could have an intermittent existence independent of the beliefs and attitudes of the people and the resources available to them.

There is a continuing debate among philosophers of action-theory whether human agents should be regarded as the causes of their actions in the sense in which the practice is what it is and does what it does independently of what certain people think and feel about it. But it is an obvious truism that no institution or practice is what it is, or does what it does, independently of what anyone whatsoever thinks or feels about it. For institutions and practices are always partially, even if to differing degrees, constituted by what certain people think and feel about them." MacIntyre, _A Landmark_, "Is A Science of Comparative Politics Possible?" in _Iwan_, 2., _ibid._, p. 174.

MacIntyre's point is supported by the way in which the regime of Shah in Iran crumbled in spite of all the forces of oppression that were available at his disposal. The authority of an institution ceases to be operative when a large number of people refuse to follow its directives and are in a position to enforce their authority against it. The history of revolutions in the different parts of the world speaks for itself.

Richard Taylor (in _Action and Purpose_) and Chirolis (in _Person and Object_) have argued for regarding human agents as causes of their actions. According to Taylor, a person is the cause of his actions in the sense that "In acting, I make something happen, I cause it, or
antecedent events are recognised as causes of consequent events, since human beings are held responsible for their actions in that they are seen as the sources of their actions. But the relationship between agents and their actions is not the same as between causes and effects (in the realm of events) for causes neither foresee their effects nor reflect about them nor are indecisive nor in conflict about them in the way in which human beings can be uncertain, indecisive, puzzled or perplexed about the course of action that they should adopt. Nor do natural

bring it about." However, Taylor points out "the word "cause" in such contexts has not the ordinary meaning of a certain relationship between events, but has rather the older meaning of the efficacy or power of an agent to produce certain results". According questions Taylor's view by asking "what is really gained in the way of understanding by saying that a person causes his actions rather than just saying that he performs them or does them? Are we not forcing language to fit a theory of causality?" (Parsons, p. 43).

Chisholm argues that "if a state of affair p occurs and if an agent a contributes causally to a necessary causal condition of p, then a contributes causally to p. This fact enables us to say that an agent may contribute causally to subsequent free actions of other agents and of himself." Thalberg points out that "we concede that a person may make a causal contribution to what happens to him, but we tentatively characterise this class of events as those events which result from one or more of the following actions of other people, one's own actions; and natural processes of inanimate objects or forces." (Enigma of agency, p. 46). But he further points out that we should not infer agent-causality from action for "there seem to be no situation in which we do use, or could intelligently use, the recommended causal idiom to describe people's behaviour." (Ibid., p. 38).
causes ever take their effects into account in the way in which the human agents appraise their actions and account for them. To the extent that human beings perform actions in terms of their reasons which they have for their actions, the relationship between agents and their actions cannot be assimilated to the relationship between causes and effects in the natural realm. Human beings act on different reasons but it is not necessary that the reasons which they avow for their actions must be the same as those which they have for their actions. The capacity to project and retrospect allows not only for rearticulation, reformulation and revisions of projects but also for reasons for actions. In the next chapter, we shall discuss nature of reasons for actions.