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## Response to Lars-Gunnar Lundh's Review of *Descriptive Psychology and the Person Concept*

Wynn R. Schwartz

Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

E-mail: [wynn\\_schwartz@g.harvard.edu](mailto:wynn_schwartz@g.harvard.edu)

<http://www.wynnschwartz.com>

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Lars-Gunnar Lundh (2025) offers a thoughtful, intellectually generous review of *Descriptive Psychology and the Person Concept* (Schwartz, 2019). I appreciate his effort to engage Descriptive Psychology (DP) on its own terms. Notably, he highlights a widespread misunderstanding—one that warrants further discussion—concerning the role of consciousness, phenomenology, and experience within the Person Concept.

Lundh raises what he reads as a relative “absence of experience” in the DP formulation. His argument is grounded in a tradition that sees the capacity for experience—particularly first-person, embodied feeling—as central to personhood. He draws on sources ranging from Wilhelm Stern (1935) and Susanne Langer (1957, 1967) to Anil Seth (2021) and Vendrell Ferran (2021), emphasizing the felt texture of vitality, emotion, and intersubjective expression.

This is not a minor point. But I believe the critique—while reasonable—rests on a conventional conflation: between what it is to be *human* and what it is to be a *person*. Descriptive Psychology explicitly separates the two. The Person Concept is not a naturalistic definition of *Homo sapiens*. It is not a theory of human embodiment, biology, or consciousness *per se*. Rather, it is a pre-empirical, pragmatic, and theory-neutral framework for identifying the necessary and sufficient features of any entity that meets the criteria for personhood—whether human, alien, or artificial.

In this light, the absence of reference to specifically human modes of experience (bodily pain, affective flow, lived temporality) is not an oversight but an intentional bracketing. The goal is not to deny that human persons are deeply embodied creatures with complex experiential lives, but to avoid building a definition of personhood that presupposes a particular embodiment. That's why robots—or at least some hypothetical forms of AI—might count as persons. It's why Descriptive Psychology resists defining personhood in terms of neural architecture, affective tone, or species membership.

That said, I agree with Lundh that experience—and what phenomenologists refer to as “first-person givenness”—is

not only relevant, but essential to a full account of human persons. Where this experience resides in the DP framework, however, may not be where one initially expects it.

It is not absent. It is there in *Cognizant Action*. Deliberate Action, as Descriptive Psychology defines it, requires cognizance: awareness of alternatives, appraisal of significance, and capacity for choice. This includes an appreciation of what matters to the actor—a concept captured by the Significance parameter in the parametric analysis of Intentional Action (IA = <I, W, K, KH, P, A, S, PC>). Significance is not a mechanical mapping of goals but reflects what is meaningful and compelling, often in felt, emotionally embodied terms.

Moreover, experience enters through *Personal Characteristics* (PC), which include states, traits, attitudes, interests and styles—including those we associate with embodiment. If someone is in pain, fatigued, elated, frightened—these states are not ignored by DP; they are accounted for in the actor's PC and in the appraisal of behavior that results from their influence. While not described in phenomenological language, the framework has room for what Lundh calls “feelings of vitality”—found in the interplay of PC, S (Significance), and the performance (P) of behavior over time.

Further, experience indirectly shapes the actor's Knowledge (K) and Know-How (KH), as these parameters reflect not only propositional beliefs or procedural competence, but lived, embodied familiarity, how it feels to be doing what they are doing—what Polanyi called “tacit knowledge.” While not identical to phenomenological insight, the DP framework accommodates its behavioral consequences.

Lundh rightly emphasizes the expressive nature of experience—what is shown in the body, in tone, in style of movement. In Descriptive terms, these are captured in the observable forms of performance and in the dramaturgical pattern of behavior that unfolds across a life. The concept of a *through-line*, for example, expresses how recurring patterns of significance and expression cohere in a life narrative—not

as a story we tell, but as the pattern of action we live.

Where Lundh raises a productive challenge is in relation to empathy. He observes that, although Carl Rogers (1975) and Heinz Kohut (1984) are referenced for their comprehensive accounts—including both perspective-taking and felt empathy—much of the chapter in question centers on the cognitive dimension: perspective-taking. I do not disagree. This focus was a methodological decision. The aim was to render empathy behaviorally describable, intelligible across contexts, and applicable to both human and nonhumans.

The Person Concept does not preclude the idea that empathy, at its fullest, encompasses felt resonance. However, it is essential that we frame this feeling in ways that facilitate shared understanding and social accountability. Descriptive Psychology prioritizes what can be captured in coherent description and practicable terms, while remaining open to future elaboration.

The formulation presented is a Paradigmatic Social Practice Formulation, in which empathic action is viewed as a Deliberate Action: one person observes another's performance and communicates to them an accurate and compassionate understanding of the significance of their behavior, in a manner the other knows how to tolerate. As with all Paradigm Case Formulations, the elements described are subject to transformation, deletion, or addition.

To further clarify my perspective, consider Thomas Nagel's (1974) philosophical question: *What is it like to be a bat?* This question is formally parallel to asking, what is it like to be a human? In both cases, the embodiment is crucial and creates a common ground for understanding felt experience while recognizing the unique experience of an individual entity. The question of what it is like to be a human is fundamentally phenomenological—it concerns the subjective, conscious experience unique to human beings. By contrast, the question of what it is like to be a person is conceptual—it asks what kinds of behavioral structure, knowledge, and dimensions of significance are required for personhood, regardless of species or physical substrate.

The Person Concept, as developed in Descriptive Psychology, is not anchored to a particular kind of body or form. Rather, it identifies the preconditions for attributing personhood, which may be met by different kinds of beings, not just humans. As a result, Descriptive Psychology adopts an optional approach to embodiment—not to deny the importance of physical form, but to avoid conflating personhood with any one specific biological or material instantiation. This abstraction ensures that the concept of “person” remains sufficiently general to apply broadly, including to potential non-human or artificial agents.

Verbal behavior offers another point of clarification. Language is essential to the person concept in DP. But it is not fundamentally dependent on the presence of experience. Verbal behavior is defined by its role in social practices—it is symbolic action that expresses meaning and serves function within a community. That meaning is *often* enriched by experience, but its intelligibility depends on shared practice, not shared sensation. Thus, a robot (or a person) can say “I’m

in pain,” but what makes that statement meaningful is not the experience itself—it is the pattern of behavior, response, and intelligibility that surrounds it.

To conclude, Lundh's review succeeds in surfacing a key tension in Descriptive Psychology's approach: the relationship between experience and action, between phenomenology and behavior. I believe the tension is resolvable—but it requires distinguishing between the human and the person, and between a scientific lexicon rooted in embodiment and a conceptual grammar designed for cross-species, cross-substrate intelligibility.

Lundh's review brings to light a central challenge within Descriptive Psychology: the interplay between personal experience and observable action—phenomenology and behavior. Intended from the outset to be flexible, neutral, and open to growth, the Person Concept benefits from the critique Lundh provides—that requires attention to the relationship of embodiment and subjective experience.

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