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Narrative Identity and Dementia

I. CO-CONSTRUCTIONIST CLAIMS FOR NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN DEMENTIA

It seems obvious that one of the harms that dementia does, both directly to the person who develops it and indirectly to their kith and kin, is to undermine the person's identity. One reason for thinking this is that, since John Locke's discussion of it, personal identity has been associated with continuity of a subjective perspective on the world held together by memory and that memory is severely curtailed in dementia. Hence dementia seems to threaten an individual's identity as a particular person, gradually undermining it.

But the necessity, or the closeness, of the connection has been criticised by a number of philosophers and healthcare professionals who subscribe to a narrative account of personal identity. Their argument goes as follows. If personal identity is constituted through a personal narrative rather than, for example, a memory connection, then while the capacity to author a self-narrative also seems to be threatened by dementia, that need not undermine personal identity providing that the narrative that constitutes identity can be *co-constructed*. As dementia takes hold, authorial responsibility can fall to others.

Clive Baldwin, a professor of narrative studies with a social work background, argues in this way. First, he claims that human subjects have narratively constituted selves and hence, pessimistically, are susceptible to harm via that narrative in, for example, the case of dementia.

[W]e are indeed narrative beings who find our Selves in the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories that others tell about us; that narrativity is essentially an inter-personal activity; that some people find their stories marginalized, themselves as narrators dispossessed; but that it does not have to be that way. The stories we tell... can subvert the status quo and open the door to new ways of telling, and thus new ways of being. I will develop this argument through the lens of the experience of people with dementia, though it has been argued elsewhere that people experiencing severe mental illness may also be narratively dispossessed. (Baldwin 2008. 223.)

But, more positively, the threat of such harm can be turned aside through the joint authorship and co-construction of identity-constituting narratives.

[W]e look towards the joint authorship of narratives where the narrative process is shared by people living with dementia and those around them. This may take the form of co-construction of narratives (see Keady & Williams 2005) whereby the final narrative is very deliberately and consciously a negotiated product between those people living with dementia and others or the piecing together and progression of the fragmented narratives of people living with dementia by those who support them. (Baldwin 2008. 225.)

The philosopher of psychiatry Jennifer Radden and psychotherapist Joan Fordyce deploy a similar argumentative strategy. First, they subscribe to a form of narrative identity theory concerning what Marya Schechtman calls ‘characterization identity’: “the set of characteristics each person has that make her the person she is” (Schechtman 1996. 74).

A person’s identity comes in the form of a self-narrative in the work of many who employ these categories. [...] The actions and experiences making up that narrative comprise the personal story of which the subject stands as ‘author’. (Radden and Fordyce 2006. 73.)

Such self narratives are always, they suggest, co-constructed, though generally this is tacit. But in the case of dementia, the relative contributions to authorship change and become more noticeable.

The construction and sustaining of the person’s characterization identity have been, until the deficits of dementia make themselves known, collective efforts conducted largely tacitly. Increasingly, as these deficits erode aspects of the person’s memory and self-awareness, the task will come to include the provision of explicit identity recognition – a response that says, in some form, ‘this is who you are and what you are like’ [...] Until now, also, to the extent that others were called on to sustain the identities of those around them, this task will have been largely mutual. Other people will have helped sustain, just as they helped constitute, my identity at the same time as I helped maintain (and constitute) theirs. Now, however, the task of holding and preserving the identity of the person suffering dementia will come to be placed more squarely on the shoulders of others (often, these are the shoulders of second persons, intimates, and the customary societal carers, women). (Radden and Fordyce 2006. 81.)

It might seem that this account is *too* optimistic. If personal identity is constituted by self-narratives that can be co-authored then providing that caregivers

or kith and kin are ready to step up to the breach then dementia is no longer a threat to identity. Radden and Fordyce concede that this is not how it *seems*, however.

The most noticeable initial problem with this model is perhaps the discomfort and sense of falsity it sometimes brings upon those others left with the burden of sustaining the identity of a loved one through these processes of holding, reinforcing, and reinscribing. Although perhaps a distorted reaction, the response is often angry and disappointed. The loved identity seems to have gone – replaced by an alien changeling, it sometimes seems, or by no one. ‘This is what you were and were like’ we want to say to the dementia sufferer, ‘but no more!’ [...] The heart-breaking aspect of this task of sustaining characterization identity cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, it is an enterprise apparently required by the very notion of characterization identity as that identity has been defined and explained here. (Radden and Fordyce 2006. 81–82.)

Taking the relevant sense of personal identity to be Schechtman’s characterization identity and taking that to be constituted by a co-constructed personal narrative, it follows, they claim, that there is a normative requirement on carers however angry and disappointed they may feel at the misleading appearance of the loss of their loved one. They do not, however, explain the nature of this obligation.

There is a more significant problem with this idea which can be illustrated by an example from the other end of life: it would allow the sincere ascription of youthful authorship of the “round robin” letters sometimes written in the UK “as from” small babies around Christmas. Such ascription would simply require a generous interpretation of a baby’s still limited behavioural repertoire by dotting parents through which the meaning and thus authorial intention would be constructed, rather than revealed. There would be no further issue of whether this accurately tracked antecedent communicative intentions. Whilst in the case of such round robin letters no abuse – except perhaps of good taste – is risked, in the case of dementia the construction of a narrative by only one party in a supposed conversation does carry that risk.

Stephen Sabat, who has done much to promote the idea that even advanced Alzheimer’s sufferers may still be ‘semiotic subjects’, gives one such example:

In many cases, caregivers often do attribute intention to the afflicted person in that caregivers may believe that he or she is acting deliberately to annoy them, when in fact the annoying behaviour is due to cognitive impairment. If the afflicted person’s recall memory is severely affected, he or she may ask the same question repeatedly. This is hardly due to an intention to annoy anyone. It is of utmost import that caregivers identify the circumstances in which intention is present and healthy and not meant to annoy. (Sabat 2001. 222.)

The idea of co-construction is particularly dangerous in psychiatry because of its history of paternalism. Humane responses to that history have stressed the perspective of individuals, the importance of respect for autonomy and patient values even where these are hard to discern. Suggesting that personal narratives, and hence selves, can be *made up* by others seems a complete abandonment of the rejection of paternalism by the most insidious of means. So why has the idea of constructing those, supposedly on someone else's behalf, come to seem a humane response to dementia? I will argue that it follows from misrecognising the fundamental difference between this dangerous, paternalistic invocation of co-construction of personal identity and the innocent role of constructionism in response to an issue that looks superficially similar: asking whether someone is still the same person as they were before dementia but where the word 'same' is used in Wittgensteinian secondary sense. What may look merely like a subtle difference makes all the difference.

The structure of this paper is, sadly, quite complex. Starting, here, from Radden and Fordyce's unfortunately paternalist account of identity and dementia, I will work 'backwards' and then 'forwards'.

Radden and Fordyce's account is based on Schechtman's 1996 narrative account of personal identity. Schechtman argues for her narrative account by saying that it is a good answer to what she calls the 'characterization question', which she contrasts with the 'reidentification question'. She rejects the reidentification question because neo-Lockean attempts to answer it fail. In arguing for this, however, she ignores the best neo-Lockean approach: McDowell's anti-reductionist version. This is a defect in her argument given that it is in part, at least, an argument from elimination.

Working "forwards", Schechtman's answer to the characterization question is a substantive narrative theory of identity but both that question and her answer is ambiguous between a notion of basic identity and a richer notion of a moral subject. Because she says that she builds her account from two others, which I will characterise – following her citations – as Dennett's and MacIntyre's, I use these to assess the two interpretations or aspects of her account. There is, however, independent reason to reject Dennett's account – and anything like it – leaving MacIntyre as the only plausible model of a narrative account. But his account does not support Radden and Fordyce's stronger claims about co-construction. Further, since Schechtman's account is motivated by an *argument from elimination* that ignores a better option, it is not clear we need a substantive account anyway. Freed from that, a better way of learning lessons from MacIntyre to apply in the case of dementia is available. Narrative can help shed light on very specific identity questions asked in the case of dementia but in a different way to Radden and Fordyce's paternalism.

II. MARYA SCHECHTMAN'S REJECTION OF THE REIDENTIFICATION QUESTION

Radden and Fordyce's account of co-construction of identity is based on their modification of Marya Schechtman's narrative constitution view of personal identity. That in turn is her proposed answer to what she calls the "characterization question" which she contrasts with the more familiar reidentification question in the philosophy of personal identity.

Most simply put, this [characterization] question asks which actions, experiences, beliefs, values, desires, character traits, and so on... are to be attributed to a given person. Reidentification theorists ask [by contrast] what it means to say that a person at t_2 is the same person as a person at t_1 ; characterization theorists ask what it means to say that a particular characteristic is that of a given person. (Schechtman 1996. 73.)

Schechtman prefers the characterization to the reidentification question and her proposed account of identity is an answer to the former rather than the latter. It might thus seem that, by answering a distinct question, it is incommensurable with answers to the latter question proposed by other philosophers, especially those working in a broadly Lockean framework. But although there is one relevant difference (to which I will return), I think that Schechtman takes her narrative constitution view to be an account of personal identity, however precisely that is to be understood, and hence to be a competitor to neo-Lockean accounts. Before returning to her answer to the characterization question, I will briefly sketch the nature of the reidentification question.

In a more recent book, Schechtman summarises her earlier approach thus:

I thus suggested that we instead think of the problem of personal identity as one of *characterization* – the question of which actions, experiences, and traits are rightly attributable to a person. The answer to a question of personal identity can then take the form of a relation between persons and psychological elements or actions *rather than of a relation between time-slices*. (Schechtman 2014. 100, italics added.)

The contrast with a relation of time slices stems from a view of personal identity that derives from an interpretation of John Locke who said:

To find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places. (Locke 1975. II. xxvii. 9.)

Person, as I take it, is the name for this self. Where-ever a Man finds, what he calls himself, there I think another may say is the same Person. It is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent Agents capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery. (Locke 1975. II. xxvii. 26.)

Locke thus suggests that personal identity has, and depends on, a continuity of inner perspective. To illustrate this, he considers a case in which the “Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince’s past Life, enter[s] and inform[s] the Body of a Cobbler as soon as deserted by his own Soul”. In such a case, he claims that “every one sees, he would be the same Person with the Prince, accountable only for the Prince’s Actions” (Locke 1975. II. xxvii. 15).

This has inspired a philosophical industry concerning the idea that being the very same person, in the forensic sense of the person who should be punished for the earlier self’s crimes, is constituted by a kind of internal consciousness of identity over time. And then, so the thought goes, if that is the case, it ought to be possible to give an account of this continuous inner awareness in terms which do not presuppose sameness of the person over time because the aim is to define the latter using the former.

There are, then, some familiar questions. Is it really the case that events that someone does not recall cannot be part of their temporally extended existence as a subject? And does not memory *presuppose* the identity of the self/person because memory is awareness of things that have happened to oneself, not just historical knowledge in an impersonal manner? Various solutions have been outlined.

Schechtman argues, however, that none of the standard answers to the re-identification question in the Lockean tradition are successful. For that reason, she recommends swapping questions and then proposing a narrative answer to her preferred question. Before considering that, it is, however, worth highlighting an option she ignores.

As John McDowell argues, there is no need to assume that a reductionist project must work (McDowell 1994. 325–340). He suggests instead that we should *not* take Locke to be trying to reduce personal identity to continuity of inner awareness (and failing at that because Locke says explicitly: “can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places” which presupposes sameness). But, rather, Locke is pointing out non-reductively that it is a feature of persons that they have an inner perspective on their lives which gathers together events as theirs without any criterion or test of identity and without even the exercise of a skill in picking themselves out (contrasting the way that one might keep track of one of the red balls in a game of snooker). One does not have to identify oneself to oneself, one’s memories as one’s own rather than someone else’s. But that is not because one is a special locus of “mind-stuff” as Descartes assumed. No, it is because one is a body, with bodily criteria of identi-

ty, but one which happens to have – as a human – an inner perspective too which goes hand in hand, effortlessly, and, in general, agrees with those bodily criteria.

What are those bodily criteria for the identity of persons over time? Here, McDowell rather breezily suggests spatio-temporal continuity *under a sortal*. One way to make this clear is to imagine an alien with a very different kind of bodily life – perhaps as a cloud of gas – studying plant and animal life on earth down as far as the cellular level. As a rabbit, for example, lives, it eats grass and excretes dung. Thus vegetable matter gets merged with the rabbit and separated. Over time, there are complex chains of connection. But the spatio-temporal continuity of any particular rabbit does not have to take account of the grass and the dung with which it is brutally continuous: but rather the career of the rabbit itself rather than its food or dung. In other words, an appeal to spatio-temporal continuity is not a reductionist explanation of rabbit identity over time. Rather, the relevant mode of spatio-temporal continuity presupposes the sortal *rabbit*. The same applies to persons though with some complications.

One such complication is raised by the science fiction cases of the sort Locke himself considers: the mind of the prince transported into the body of the cobbler. In such a case, identity goes with the inner dimension rather than the outer body. But that is not to say that, in general, we have an understanding of the inner dimension independently of, or more fundamental than, the normal bodily criteria of identity.

The fact that Schechtman ignores this possibility is one reason to be suspicious of her argument from elimination in favour of the characterisation over the reidentification question. There may simply be no need to articulate a narrative theory of identity in the first place. Putting this point on hold for the moment, I will outline the development of her answer to her favoured question.

III. SCHECHTMAN'S CHARACTERIZATION QUESTION AND NARRATIVE CONSTITUTION ANSWER

In more recent work, Schechtman provides the following overview of her position.

I thus suggested that we instead think of the problem of personal identity as one of *characterization* – the question of which actions, experiences, and traits are rightly attributable to a person. The answer to a question of personal identity can then take the form of a relation between persons and psychological elements or actions rather than of a relation between time-slices. Such an account, I argued, will be non-reductive but still informative. In particular I urged that rather than thinking of identity-constituting psychological continuity in terms of overlapping chains of psychological connections properly caused, we should instead understand it in narrative terms, a revision

made possible by framing the question as one of characterization. We constitute ourselves as persons, on this view, by developing and operating with a (mostly implicit) autobiographical narrative which acts as the lens through which we experience the world. (Schechtman 2014. 100.)

The characterization question, and her answer to it, is, however, ambiguous. In asking which actions, experiences, and traits are rightly attributable to a person, it might be asking which are *authentic* expressions of the person, their *moral* selves, aspects of their *deeper* character by contrast with momentary whims or temptations, or the distortions of alcoholic high spirits, for example. Or it might mean simply which of all the actions in human history were those of a particular person. More prosaically, the latter might be asked by a detective of an act of theft: who did it?

Schechtman has conceded this point about her earlier 1996 work.

For many, the switch from the reidentification to the characterization question automatically signals a switch to questions about the moral self. There are some good reasons for thinking so – my first move in introducing the view is to draw a distinction between the “Who am I?” question raised by a confused adolescent (which I link to the characterization question) and the “Who am I?” question asked by an amnesia victim (which I link to the reidentification question). At the same time, however, I meant for the characterization question also to answer questions about attribution at the most fundamental level – not only which beliefs and desires are *truly* mine in the sense of the moral self, but which are mine in the most basic and literal sense. (Schechtman 2014. 102.)

Given this latent ambiguity in the question, how should her earlier 1996 answer – the account which informs Radden and Fordyce’s view – be assessed? Fortunately, in her earlier work, Schechtman suggests a clue. She reports that her narrative constitution view:

draws its inspiration from a number of sources both philosophical and psychological which argue either that persons are self creating [...] or that the lives of persons are narrative in form. Weaving strands from these discussions together with my own analysis, I develop a view according to which a person creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative – a story of his life. (Schechtman 1996. 93.)

I suggest that these two distinct strands are responses to distinct interpretations, or aspects, of the characterization questions and I will use two of the philosophers Schechtman cites as sources to examine these two strands: Dennett and MacIntyre.

1. *Persons are self-creating*

Schechtman cites Daniel Dennett as a philosopher who defends the idea that *persons are self-creating*. He claims that a self is a “centre of narrative gravity”. To outline his view, he suggests an analogy with the physical notion of a centre of gravity.

A centre of gravity is *just* an abstractum. It’s just a fictional object. But when I say it’s a fictional object, I do not mean to disparage it; it’s a wonderful fictional object, and it has a perfectly legitimate place within serious, sober, *echt* physical science. (Dennett 1992. 104.)

The idea of a centre of gravity is deployed within a branch of physics to describe and predict the behaviour of physical systems acting under physical forces. What a centre of gravity is depends on this theoretical context and it is one of the useful tools and ideas that go to make that context. The concept is one amongst others interdependent on a theoretical stance.

Selves are given similar treatment. Like centres of gravity or mental states, they are theoretical, even fictional, entities articulated within an interpretative theoretical stance.

A self is also an abstract object, a theorist’s fiction. The theory is not particle physics but what we might call a branch of people-physics; it is more soberly known as a phenomenology or hermeneutics, or soul-science (*Geisteswissenschaft*). The physicist does an *interpretation*, if you like, of the chair and its behaviour, and comes up with the theoretical abstraction of a centre of gravity, which is then very useful in characterising the behaviour of the chair in the future, under a wide variety of conditions. The hermeneuticist or phenomenologist – or anthropologist – sees some rather more complicated things moving about in the world – human beings and animals – and is faced with a similar problem of interpretation. It turns out to be theoretically perspicuous to organise the interpretation around a central abstraction: each person has a *self* (in addition to a centre of gravity). In fact we have to posit selves for *ourselves* as well. The theoretical problem of self-interpretation is at least as difficult and important as the problem of other-interpretation. (Dennett 1992. 104.)

What is the motivation for Dennett’s version of a narrative approach? I think that it is useful to consider the perceived alternative to it that Dennett rejects. He gives a clear statement of this in the following passage which starts with a brisk re-iteration of the advantages of his narrative account for describing psychopathology but also mentions the alternative to which it stands opposed.

We sometimes encounter psychological disorders, or surgically created disunities, where the only way to interpret or make sense of them is to posit in effect two centers of gravity, two selves. One isn't creating or discovering a little bit of ghost stuff in doing that. One is simply creating another abstraction. It is an abstraction one uses as part of a theoretical apparatus to understand, and predict, and make sense of, the behavior of some very complicated things. The fact that these abstract selves seem so robust and real is not surprising. They are much more complicated theoretical entities than a center of gravity. And remember that even a center of gravity has a fairly robust presence, once we start playing around with it. But no one has ever seen or ever will see a center of gravity. As David Hume noted, no one has ever seen a self, either. (Dennett 1992. 114.)

Dennett here supports his account by reinforcing the apparent robustness and reality of narrative selves on the basis of a comparison with the robustness of centres of gravity. Nevertheless they are "created" abstractions. And this contrasts with the other possibility: "creating or discovering a little bit of ghost stuff". I take it that more important alternative here is "*discovering* a little bit of ghost stuff" which stands in as a brisk summary of a Cartesian account.

It should come as no surprise that Dennett's main opponent is a form of Cartesianism, whether of a traditional immaterialist kind or a form of materialism which shares a key feature. That feature, and a key target of his *Consciousness Explained*, is the idea that "somewhere, conveniently hidden in the obscure 'centre' of the mind/brain, there is a Cartesian Theatre, a place where 'it all comes together' and consciousness happens" (Dennett 1993. 39). Even if Descartes' immaterialism is rejected, this idea can remain implicit in thinking about the brain.

Let's call the idea of such a locus in the brain *Cartesian Materialism*, since it's the view you arrive at when you discard Descartes's dualism but fail to discard the imagery of a central (but material) Theatre where 'it all comes together'. The pineal gland would be one candidate for such a Cartesian Theatre [...] (Dennett 1993. 107.)

I take it that an immaterial centre might constitute a self and a material centre could at least underpin one. Dennett rejects any such approach and deploys the narrative account as (part of) his alternative. This also explains his comment (above) that "[a]s David Hume noted, no one has ever seen a self". He continues by quoting with approval Hume's doomed attempt to spot his own self among his mental states.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never

can observe anything but the perception... If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls himself; though I am certain there is no such principle in me. (Hume 1978. 252.)

Hume's final comment is clearly meant to be ironic. Introspection, Hume suggests, reveals nothing that could stand in the sort of relation to one's mental states that a self is supposed to do. This leads him to advocate a minimalist "bundle theory" of mind. The self is identified simply with the mental states encountered in introspection and not with an ego which stands in a relation to them.

Dennett shares Hume's opposition to a Cartesian ego but he adds a principle of organisation to the mental states gathered together via narrative. The self is not just a *bundle* of states but states *structured* in a narrative. Given his related account of mental states there is no tension between primitively real mental states and mere fictional selves. Both mental states and the narrative structure that adds up to a self are theoretical constructs. But it is also important to note that there is no antecedently understood author to the narrative. That idea would correspond to a substantial, pre-narrative self. Dennett's idea, by contrast, is that the self just is the structured narrative.

Given the choice between Cartesian "ghost stuff" and a narrative account, then the latter is obviously the more attractive. It also seems to receive support as descriptively accurate from both Hume's introspection and Dennett's "hetero-phenomenological" method which at least takes account of first person reports (whilst not uncritically according them apodictic certainty). But the choice is, nevertheless, a forced choice.

If Schechtman's narrative constitution account is viewed through the prism of Dennett's account, then it can be seen as answering the more austere question of basic identity, rather than to the richer notion of the nature of the moral self. Schechtman seems to take a narrative answer to the characterization question to be a rival to the reductionist version of the neo-Lockean account of basic identity. Sniffy about traditional accounts that argue that the different temporal stages of a person are unified by overlapping chains of memory, she raises a prior question: "what unites even at a given temporal stage the experiences that are those of a particular individual?" and answers narrative. Narrative unites at a given time. But it also unites over time because narratives are temporally extended wholes. Further, it suggests a nice distinction. On a narrative account, temporal elements are abstractions from a whole rather than free-standing elements needing uniting together. They are more like the pitch and timbre of a note than like the individual bricks that can be combined to make a wall.

Dennett, too, deploys narrative as a basic principle of organisation to unite actions, experiences, and traits in a single person. But although it is austere, it is nevertheless radical. Fully assessing such a radical claim about the connection between self and narrative lies outside the scope of this paper. But it is worth noting that, influential though it has been, it faces at least three significant difficulties:

First, what is the claim actually being made? Are selves narratives or are they the authors of narratives? They cannot be both. But in many published accounts, these two ideas are not consistently distinguished. Baldwin, for example, blurs both together because, in addition to the claim above that selves are stories, he also says:

If we are narrative beings and the primary narrative of our life is the one *we construct* for ourselves in relationship with others, then the maintenance of narrative agency takes on major importance. (Baldwin 2005. 1025, italics added.)

According to this second passage, *we construct*, or are authors, of the narrative rather than being the narrative itself. Similarly, in the quotation above, Dennett says “In fact *we* have to *posit* selves for ourselves as well” (italics added). But if selves are authors of narratives then what constitutive work is the idea of narrative doing, after all?

Second, if selves are, literally, narratives then how do narratives have meaning? A narrative is made up of a collection of signs (written or spoken). So how can those signs come to carry a meaning? The problem is this. Most plausible accounts of how linguistic meaning is possible presuppose an embodied agent whose beliefs and actions are appealed to to explain meaning. Gricean theories, for example, explain linguistic meaning by appeal to a speaker’s intentions to communicate his or her beliefs by such and such signs (Grice 1969). But a narrative account of self inverts that order of priority and thus must, somehow, explain the meaning of a narrative without appealing to agents. And that seems a difficult venture.

Third, if selves are constituted by narratives then the component elements of the narratives must not presuppose any concept of self. But it is difficult to see how a narrative account of self could avoid including elements which correspond to psychological states. A narrative which avoided all mention of mental phenomena would be useless to explain the notion of a self. But if the narrative presupposes psychological states, then that will surely, illicitly, presuppose a concept of self of whom the psychological states are states (Thornton 2003).

I think that the difficulties Dennett’s account faces are endemic in substantive narrative accounts of the metaphysics of the self. If this is a strand in Schechtman’s narrative account, so much the worse for it.

2. *The lives of persons are narrative in form*

Schechtman also invokes a distinct idea: the lives of persons are narrative in form. One philosopher she invokes in support of this idea is Alasdair MacIntyre. This idea, while still contentious, is much less radical than the idea that selves just are narratives. MacIntyre, for example, is led to it through a consideration of the way action explanation iterates.

It is a conceptual commonplace, both for philosophers and for ordinary agents, that one and the same segment of human behavior may be correctly characterized in a number of different ways. To the question ‘What is he doing?’ the answers may with equal truth and appropriateness be ‘Digging’, ‘Gardening’, ‘Taking exercise’, ‘Preparing for winter’ or ‘Pleasing his wife’. Some of these answers will characterize the agent’s intentions, other unintended consequences of his actions, and of these unintended consequences some may be such that the agent is aware of them and others not. What is important to notice immediately is that any answer to the questions of how we are to understand or to explain a given segment of behavior will presuppose some prior answer to the question of how these different correct answers to the question ‘What is he doing?’ are related to each other. (MacIntyre 1981. 206.)

MacIntyre argues that the interconnection between different explanations of actions appealing to narrower or broader contexts has the form of a narrative. Actions are intelligible insofar as they can be fitted into an intelligible narrative and this process iterates. Making sense of one action by citing a broader context of action into which it fits itself presupposes that that broader context makes sense. And hence, MacIntyre concludes, it presupposes a narrative view of the whole of a life, which he connects to the idea of personal identity or selfhood.

What the narrative concept of selfhood requires is thus twofold. On the one hand, I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death; I am the *subject* of a history that is my own and no one else’s, that has its own peculiar meaning. I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives... To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one’s birth to one’s death is, I remarked earlier, to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life. (MacIntyre 1981. 217.)

If Schechtman's narrative constitution account is viewed through the prism of MacIntyre's account, then it can be seen as answering to the richer notion of the nature of the moral self rather than to more austere question of basic identity because, as MacIntyre acknowledges, his is a modest and anti-reductionist account of selfhood or personal identity.

I am not arguing that the concepts of narrative or of intelligibility or of accountability are more fundamental than that of personal identity. The concepts of narrative, intelligibility and accountability presuppose the applicability of the concept of personal identity [...] (MacIntyre 1981. 218.)

The account charts a connection between selves as subjects or agents, their actions and the broader narratives into which these fit. It does not provide an independent way to characterise selves, persons or personal identity.

There is reason, too, to believe that this is the sense of identity that Radden and Fordyce have in mind.

New terms and contrasts have been introduced to separate the more political, and more recent, types of identity discourse. Marya Schechtman speaks of identity as concerning *characterization* (Schechtman 1996) (The identity associated with earlier theorizing in the Lockean tradition she designates *reidentification* identity, in contrast.) [...] The notion of characterization identity captures other presuppositions found in less formal discussions of identity as well, particularly those associated with the politics of recognition. (Radden and Fordyce 2006. 73.)

But does a narrative account of a richer notion of identity, associated with identity politics and identity crises, and on the model of MacIntyre's account, support their radical con-constructivist claims?

There is no reason to think it does. MacIntyre's account is a generalisation from action explanation by reasons concerning which neither constructivism nor co-constructivism seem plausible. The ascription, or avowal, of a reason for action *answers* to the facts about motivation rather than constructing them. First person reports can be sincere or insincere because of that. While first person privilege attaches to reports of motivation, as it does for other aspects of mental life, this is not where the element of truth in constructionism applies to action explanation specifically. That element consists in the fact that *actions* are constituted – created, perhaps – by agents. Decisions are made – constructed, perhaps – by subjects and, if they are practical, executed. But subsequent explanations of actions answer to those facts. Co-construction may thus apply to decisions for action jointly arrived at but that provides no grounds for thinking co-constructivism is true of action *explanations*. And hence there is no reason to think it anything other than a distortion of a narrative conception of the whole

of a life, and hence a self, on MacIntyre's view. Co-constructivism is not only dangerously paternalistic in the case of dementia but it is also implausible as any account of personal identity.

IV. A POSITIVE USE OF NARRATIVE IN DEMENTIA?

Despite this sceptical view of narrative as a means of co-constructing identity in the face of dementia, it may, nevertheless have *some* role. Consider the case of the offspring who asks of their elderly and confused father: "Is he *still* my dad? Is he still *him*?" Such a question is not a question about what Schechtman calls basic identity, which might be asked by a long-lost offspring in order to find which unrecognised person in a nursing home, for example, is their father. Rather, if the question is asked of a particular person, whether he is *still* their father, it carries a different sense.

I suggest that it is a question about whether there is still sufficient continuity of character to *count* as the same person in a richer but quite specific sense (see below). This is not simply the characterization question as reconstructed using MacIntyre's narrative concept of selfhood (and certainly not as asking about the basic sense of identity in the style of Dennett's account of narrative centres of gravity). It is asked in a context in which, despite the person concerned being the same person – in the basic sense – who used to be a loving father or fugitive Nazi, or, strangely, both, the ravages of memory loss call into question one sense of (Lockean) forensic identity. In the case where the father is a fugitive Nazi, there *may* be no reason to punish a confused old man who has no understanding of that for which he is being punished. But neither the clear answer: "Yes: he is the same person in the basic sense of identity" nor the answer "No: he should not be held forensically responsible for past actions because he has lost his memory of them" is appropriate for *this* question. And yet it is a question that can seem pressing.

That questions asked with the same words may call for quite different answers is nicely illustrated in a discussion of Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

Someone bereaved might exclaim, "Why did she die?" Such a question, uttered in a particular tone and under particular circumstances, would only be taken by the most obtuse as requests for an explanation – as being satisfied by the sort of response appropriate to the question in the context, say, of a coronial enquiry. (Redding 1987. 264.)

In such a case, what looks like a question may not be one at all but an expression of loss clothed in interrogative form. By contrast, in the case I have in mind, I do think that the apparent question "Is he still my dad?" is a genuine question

meaning something like: “Is he still the same person that I remember” but in such a way that the notion of sameness is not captured by either the basic or the forensic senses set out above.

I suggest that the asking of this question in this context stands to those senses in the way that Wittgenstein describes as “secondary sense” (Wittgenstein 1953/2009, part II, sec. xi). The first instance he gives is the attitude most of us have towards words. We feel that a word carries its meaning somehow immediately with it. It can lose this kind of meaning if repeated. Wittgenstein describes this kind of immediate perception of the meaning of a word in isolation as a form of understanding meaning. Since Wittgenstein’s official recommendation is to think of understanding as grasp of a practice, the use of the words ‘understanding’ and ‘meaning’ in the case at hand is not straightforward. It is not a metaphor, however, because nothing can be said to explain why we want to use these words for this kind of experience. But whilst this is not a metaphorical use it is nevertheless a secondary use: one which we find natural given the primary use, but which is discontinuous with, and could not be used to teach, the primary use.

Another example Wittgenstein gives is the use of ‘fat’ in the claim that Wednesday is fat.

Given the two concepts ‘fat’ and ‘lean’, would you be inclined to say that Wednesday was fat and Tuesday lean, or the other way round? (I am strongly inclined towards the former.) Now have ‘fat’ and ‘lean’ some different meaning here from their usual one? – They have a different use. – So ought I really to have used different words? Certainly not. – I want to use *these* words (with their familiar meanings) *here* [...] Asked “What do you really mean here by ‘fat’ and ‘lean’?”, I could only explain the meanings in the usual way. I could not point them out by using Tuesday and Wednesday as examples [...] The secondary meaning is not a “metaphorical” meaning. If I say, “For me the vowel e is yellow”, I do not mean: ‘yellow’ in a metaphorical meaning for I could not express what I want to say in any other way than by means of the concept of yellow. (Wittgenstein 1953/2009, part II §§274–278.)

Secondary sense as introduced is neither a metaphor nor a simile because there is no way to begin to justify the use by articulating the similarity with the literal sense. It is spontaneous extension of the paradigmatic meaning of a word but reliant on that meaning.

Whilst experiencing the meaning of a word or ascribing a width to days of the week may seem to be of limited interest, the Wittgensteinian philosopher Oswald Hanfling argues that the secondary use of words is widespread (Hanfling 1991). In aesthetics, he argues, words such as ‘sad’ applied to music are used in secondary sense. (The music need not make a hearer sad, does not sound like a sad person etc.). In the description of feelings, phrases such as ‘pins and needles’

dles', 'butterflies in the stomach' and 'stabbing pains' are all used in this way. Wittgenstein's own description of "feelings of unreality" in which "everything seems somehow not real" is also secondary.

Wittgenstein himself gives an example of an aesthetic description of a piece of music which seems to be a case of secondary sense:

If I say for example: Here it's as if a conclusion were being drawn, here as if something were confirmed, *this* is like an answer to what went before – then my understanding presupposes a familiarity with inferences, with confirmations, with answers. (Wittgenstein 1967. §175.)

The application to music of language whose primary use concerns the description of arguments lacks a justification through an appeal to objective similarities. Someone who was mystified by this deployment of language need have made no mistake. But that is not to say that for those for whom this extension comes naturally there are no aesthetic justifications for hearing a particular phrase as a conclusion of a previous passage of music or as answering a previous phrase. Such justifications might consist in playing the music with a particular emphasis or stripped of some of its detail. So while there is no justification for the whole extension of a language of argument to music, for those who do find it natural there can be justifications or points of disagreement for specific applications. Nevertheless, even in this case, the justifications can come to an end without agreement and again implying no cognitive shortcoming. One may simply disagree with hearing a theme as the conclusion.

Aesthetic discussions [are] like discussions in a court of law, where you try to "clear up the circumstances" of the action which is being tried, hoping that in the end what you say will "appeal to the judge" [...] if by giving reasons of this sort you make another person "see what you see" but it still "does not appeal to him" that is "an end" of the discussion (Moore 1955. 19).

This combination of (unjustified) spontaneous extension but piecemeal partial justification captures the case at hand. The offspring who asks whether their father is still their father, still the same person, still their 'dad', even though already having answers to the basic question and the forensic question is pressing the notion of sameness in a novel way. 'Same' in this case is used in secondary sense.

In this context, narrative can provide the material for a response which does not simply answer to the facts. Imagine a case in which the elderly person in question cannot recall who his children are but, despite that, he reacts to them with affective warmth. Perhaps hearing a once familiar tune prompts jovial attempts to whistle the refrain. Perhaps he is visibly calmer in the presence of his

offspring, instinctively reaching out a hand. In such a case, a narrative account may weave together these affective responses in such a way to trump cognitive failings. Perhaps the offspring sees in a single gesture, or hears in a single characteristic utterance, sufficient sign of the presence of the remembered father to be reassured and to answer the question in the affirmative.

In such case, the mark of the success of the narrative in conveying an answer to the question – whether happily positive or sadly negative – is not simply answering to neutral facts. Rather, it is the response, to the proffered narrative answer, of the person who asks the question, akin to Wittgenstein's account of aesthetic justification. The success of the narrative answer lies in part at least in the affective response of the person who asks the question. What constitutes the success of the narrative in affirming or denying that the person still is the father is not its objectively successfully marshalling the facts but rather its being accepted as significant by the questioner.

That is, I suggest, the very limited truth in a constructionist approach to a narrative form of identity in dementia, one which carries no risk of insidious paternalism.

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