

Embodiment & Narrative

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Types of Questions

◎ Reidentification

- > Necessary and sufficient conditions for persistence as the same numerical being
- > Survival as all-or-nothing
- > Relevant to

◎ Characterization

- > Which psychological traits (character, personality, memories, behavior) are central to someone's self-conception
- > Survival as matter of degree

Making Sense of Oneself

- ◎ “To be a persisting subject is to be a subject whose present experiences are shaped by the past, which exerts and cognitive and affective influence on the present [...] and whose present actions are directed toward an anticipated future” (105)
- ◎ Past, present, and future need to be *meaningful* and *intelligible* to me and others in order to persist in this way

Crises & Breakdowns

- ⦿ Emotions, experiences, desires, values, and beliefs would lose their significance
- ⦿ Can result from trauma, religious/political conversions, aging, radical changes to one's body or mentation
- ⦿ “Self”-binding examples
 - Have concerns about breakdown/break of future “self” (e.g., Russian couple)

Critiques of Narrative Accounts

- Falsely assume our lives “are more coherent, structured, and intelligible than they really are” (106)
- “gloss over all this randomness and contingency” (106)
 - Life sequences frequently not neatly causal, structured as beginning-middle-end with clear plot points, climax, etc.
- “assume a degree of authorial control over the story that we simply don’t have in our lives” (106)

Responses to Critiques

- ◉ Does not require self-conscious structuring of life as a plot, viewing self and others as characters
- ◉ “The claim is rather that the lives of persons cannot be thought of as a series of discrete, disconnected experiences or events but rather have an implicit narrative form” (106)
- ◉ Narrative as an organizing principle for making certain events, characters as more or less prominent, meaningful, intelligible
 - > Ongoing, dynamic process

Explicit vs. Implicit Narrative

◎ **Explicit narrative**

- > Can be articulated; consciously (at least in some contexts) affects actions, behaviors, emotional responses
- > Might not be *completely* transparent

◎ **Implicit narrative**

- > Affects her self-conception and interactions with others, but unknown/unconscious
- > *Does implicit narrative undermine the unification of my sense of self and agency over time?*
- > *Will explicit narrative always trump implicit narrative in someone's identity?*

Social Aspects

- ◎ **Constraints on narrative identity**
 - > Cohere with reality
 - > Intelligibility to others

- ◎ **Needs personal relationships and social institutions to make sense of oneself**
 - > Can be “extremely fraught in social contexts marked by such oppressions, or in contexts where others do not recognize and treat one as a person and do not make an effort to understand one’s narrative” (III)

The Body & Embodiment

- ◎ Should not be viewed as impersonal object/thing, mere vessel of psychological traits
- ◎ Body has third-personal importance but **first-personal** significance as well
- ◎ “subjectivity is not merely psychological; it is also embodied” (114)

Embodied Subjectivity

- Body provides a (relatively) stable basis for development of personhood
- Determines what types of interactions with the world are possible, feasible, desirable
 - Affects which interactions are recognized as truly expressive of the individual
- “we experience our bodies not as objects in the world, but as the perspective from which we perceive the world and as our mode of engagement with it” (115)
- Experience, interpretation of body mediated by social contexts, institutions (e.g., what gender is thrust on a body; whether disability is accommodated; whether sexual assault is viewed and prosecuted as a crime)

Questions? Comments?