Narrative Identity and Non-Conscious Particulars

by

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ABSTRACT

There exists a staggeringly large set of metaphysical problems associated with the identity of particular things. These problems range from difficulties with deciding what ought to be included in the static identity of a thing to those concerned with how things exist overtime. There are questions about how we are to understand the boundaries of thing's identity, about whether things can overlap, about whether things have their properties necessarily, or whether particular things are necessary beings. These difficulties are multiplied when we begin to think of identity over time. Questions are raised regarding the continuity of objects, whether they endure or perdure, whether objects are continuous or contiguous time slices.

Many of these problems have historical roots, but have been somewhat exacerbated by shifts toward quantum physics and theories of relativity. In light of our current understanding of the physical nature of the universe, we can no longer analyze things in terms of primary and secondary qualities so to forestall these concerns: even the extension of a thing is relative to its environment. Considerations about the diachronic nature of identity, causality, possible worlds, and their modal supervaluations, detract from our ability to think of things as static and exact, in spite of our experience. Basic to

all of these problems are worries about relations.

I shall not offer any complete solutions to these problems here, but propose a philosophical treatment to ameliorate their standing, to begin to show the fly the way out of the bottle, as it were. My aim is to provide a means by which we can deal with the role of relations in identity and begin to dissolve these seemingly intractable debates. The treatment I shall proffer follows on a rising trend in the literature on personal identity.

Some authors have suggested that a criterion for personal identity ought to be the narrative particular individuals negotiate with their community and with themselves. Perspective is what matters for narrative theories of identity. It is the focus on perspective that grants a subject ownership of her identity, a feature unavailable to most theories that focus on physical or psychological continuity. Unlike traditional accounts which focus on memory, the role of memory in the narrative account is dynamic in the sense that memory it is a process of construction, a dialectic in the Greek sense. But more of interest to my purposes here is how the narrative account allows relations to be included in personal identity: a person's identity is not constructed in a vacuum, but developed within the context of a community. This means that contingent, relations are addressed as part of a person's identity and that the relevant community is "written" into a person's identity.

In the narrative theory of personal identity we have a way of understanding the internal and external relations that constitute a person's identity, which allows us to get at persons 'as we know them.' I intend to detail a theory for the identity of particulars in terms of narrative identity. In this, I shall consider the perspectives of things and hope begin to address the relational components of identity, which have hitherto given rise to so many metaphysical worries, at get at the nature of particularity.

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for my Guru,

Paramhansa Yogananda

Chapter One

Narrative Theories of Personal Identity:
Two Faces of Narrative Identity

Abstract:

Narrative accounts of personal identity have it that personhood is constituted by the narratives that individuals negotiate within their communities. Unlike other theories of personal identity, which focus on reidentification criteria, narrative theories try to capture the normative and experiential aspects of personhood. In this chapter, I argue that narrative is a Janus of sorts. That is, there are two co-present roles that narrative plays in constructing identity: narrative functions as both a heuristic, and a constituent of identity.

0. Introduction

Since John Locke and David Hume took an interest in the discipline some three centuries ago, much ink has been spilled to the end of developing a theory of personhood.[1] Perhaps no sub-discipline within philosophy attracts such broad attention as that of personal identity. The contemporary literature draws writers from philosophy, psychology, bioethics, and others of multiple philosophical lineages. But more than this, questions concerning personal identity matter to most everyone; we, each of us, are a kind of expert on personal identity. However, the personal identity literature has most times failed to appeal to the kind of expertise we all possess; it has failed to meet our pre-philosophical notions about personhood. And, to the extent that this is true, this is to the detriment of the discipline.

Most philosophers interested in personal identity attempt to give an account of what it is to be a person, and the same person over time. They are not so much concerned with evidentiary questions of identity, but with questions about what is constitutive of identity. That is, philosophers are not interested in how to determine that some person at t_1 is the same person at t_2, but rather, *what it is* for someone to be the same person over time. Most proffer an account of identity in terms of some bodily, brain, or psychological criterion. Theories based on one of, or some combination of, these criteria try to provide a *reidentification theory of identity*: an account of how a person at t_2 is the same person at t_1. But this strategy has come under criticism from authors, such as Marya Schechtman, who claim that, despite their sophistication, these theories say nothing to meet our ordinary intuitions about what is to be a person. What matters to persons qua persons may vary between individuals, but these critics claim that we often think about

[1] See Hume (1888) and Locke (1975).

personhood in terms of our roles as social beings. These roles get defined in virtue of the stories that we tell about ourselves to others, and to ourselves. On these accounts narrative is the criterion for personal identity.

Narrative theories of identity argue that the criterion for personhood ought to be the narratives that particular individuals negotiate with their community and with themselves. On this account, the notion that personal identity can be divined through perspectiveless, objective consideration, (one strictly based on a set of psychological, or physical, relational criteria), is discarded. Instead, narrative theorists rely on the perspective of the individual to decide identity: the existing relations of the individual to the community situate that individual within that community, they give perspective and determine the starting point for negotiating her identity. This means that certain contingent, though nevertheless important, external relations can be addressed as metaphysical constituents. That is, my role as a parent, son, and partner can be taken as being integral to my constitution as a person. This is a dimension unavailable to other theories of persons. In preference to identity's being determined in a vacuum, on the basis of matching some criteria, it is developed within the context of a real environment through the exchange of narratives.

In light of the aforementioned divergence in the literature, we might divide the philosophical discipline concerning personhood into two fields, those that focus on questions of reidentification, and those that focus on narrative theories of identity. Each has its own strength. The reidentification theorists can answer questions regarding the (re)identification of humans who have peculiar histories and bodies: questions about the *what* of personhood. The narrative theorists can answer the normative questions of

identity: questions about the moral dimension of personhood, the *who* of personhood. However, if one looks closely at the literature on narrative theories of identity, one sees that narrative plays a dual role with respect to identity: narrative is both a heuristic for persons and constituent of persons.

In the professional psychological literature on narrative and identity, writers refer to narrative almost exclusively as heuristic: a methodology for one to learn about oneself and others. This is not strictly true for the philosophical literature on the subject: philosophers talk about narrative as a way to knowing identity, and also a constituent of that identity. However, they tend not to explicate the latter function of narrative. This is problematic. If philosophers want to give an account of what it is to be a person (and the same person over time), they must give an account that does not focus solely on the heuristic function of narrative.

1. Narrative Motivations

i. Schechtman

Narrative theories of personal identity are psychological accounts of personhood developed as an alternative to theories that focus on reidentification criterion. In contrast to other psychological accounts, those that focus on reidentification, narrative theorists do not rely on any feature of resemblance, or continuity of psychological states. Instead, they argue that every important feature of personhood, everything that should matter to persons as persons, is captured in the story one negotiates with one's community. Moreover, they eschew the notion that we can talk about a person's identity without talking about her actual role as a person within that community. And this demands that

we include rights and responsibilities in our conception of a person from the point of view of the stories she, and others, tell about her person. In this, they hope to remedy the fault of traditional philosophical accounts of personhood that have hitherto failed to meet our everyday intuitions about what it is to be a person, and the same person over time.

Marya Schechtman has devoted an entire text to narrative theories of identity entitled The Constitution of Selves (1996). In this work, Schechtman spends some time explicating the general failings of the philosophical literature that focuses on reidentification as a way to personhood. Near the beginning of her introduction she remarks that,

> Facts about personal identity stand at the core of our ordinary practice and lay the foundations for our day-to-day interactions. Philosophical problems of identity should thus be compelling, accessible, and of general appeal. Yet treatments of this topic in contemporary analytic philosophy have been highly abstract, technical, and specialized. Philosophical discussion has yielded some extremely sophisticated theories of personal identity but they do not seem to be about persons as we know them, nor do they capture the real-world implications of personal identity (Schechtman 1).

She goes on to argue that even the most sophisticated psychological accounts of personhood fail to say anything meaningful about what it is to be a person. And, if we want to attend to the questions about what constitutes a person, we ought to focus on the psychological components of persons that matter to us as persons.

What matters to persons qua persons? Schechtman identifies four crucial features of our identity as we experience it in our lives: our responsibilities, our relations with others, our self-interested concern about survival, and our interest in compensation, (hereafter the 'four features' or 'four characteristics'). These four features are the things we ought to be concerned about when we attempt to give an account of personhood. To the extent that reidentification theories fail to account for these features of personhood, they fail to tell us anything about what it is to be a person. And, according to

Schechtman, the reidentification theorists who focus on a psychological criterion of identity will necessarily fail to provide a psychological account that attends to the four features. This last claim is worth some attention before moving on.

The general motivation that leads us to argue for a psychological criterion, rather than a physical or bodily criterion, is simple: we want to be able to say something about how it is to be an experiencing person. However, if we are to adopt a view of persons in terms of reidentification criteria, based on psychological continuity, we are met with a number of difficulties, the most damaging of which is the fact that identity seems to consist in a relation that is at odds with our motivation for adopting that criterion in the first place. That is, if we say that identity consists in being the 'closest psychological continuer,' we must admit that identity is had in virtue of a relation between two (or more) psychological states.[2] The fact that my past self has a psychological state that strongly resembles my current self is what grounds identity, not the kinds of experiences I have as a person. On such accounts, experience is not constitutive of identity, but only derivative of identity in a weak sense.[3]

The strong reply to these claims given by psychologically-oriented reidentification theories is to maintain that no account of personal identity can capture our intuitions about the role of experience; the demands of the experiencing person are

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[2] This is Nozick's view in his (1981). For more on psychological continuity criterion, see Parfit (1984) and Shoemaker (1970).

[3] Working in the background here, and in Schechtman's work, is some version of what's known as the "extreme claim": that we have no reason to be particularly concerned for our future selves. A proper discussion of the role of the extreme claim in narrative theories of identity is beyond the scope of this section, and indeed, this paper. It will suffice to say, for now, that the extreme claim will not militate against any version of the narrative account of identity because future selves do not get identified as being, in any way, distinct from current persons. I shall return briefly to the extreme claim when I discuss narrative as a constituent. But, for more on the extreme claim, see Schechtman's third chapter in her (1996), also Parfit (1984), and Whiting (1986).

impossible to meet. This is true, so far as it goes. But, as Schechtman points out, "We have not yet, however, been shown that there is *no* account of identity that can capture these intuitions – only that there is no *reidentification criterion* that can, and this is quite another matter" (Schechtman 66).

Narrative theories of identity, on the other hand, can account for the four features. On this view, persons construct their identity by way of constructing an autobiographical narrative of their experience as persons, one that includes their roles *as* persons.

> At the core of this view is the assertion that individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to have experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs. Some, but not all, individuals weave stories of their lives, and it is their doing so which makes them persons (*ibid* 94).

These stories include the normative implications of personhood because they are stories about the sorts of things that persons do in virtue of their being experiencing subjects with rights and responsibilities, rather than appropriately related objects.

ii. Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur thinks that at the root of these problems is a failure to recognize an ontological distinction between two uses of identity: "identity as sameness (Latin: *idem;* English: *same*; German: *Gleich*) and identity as selfhood (Latin: *ipse*; English: *self*; German: *Selbts*). Selfhood is not sameness" (Ricoeur 189).[4] It is the intersection of these two senses of identity that interests Ricoeur. At the point where these concepts of identity meet we should find a theory of identity that can answer both questions about the identification, and reidentification, of persons, and also questions about what matters for personhood itself. In other words, we should be able to answer questions not only about

[4] Ricoeur in Wood ed. (1992).

the *what* of persons - which he sees as the preoccupation of the analytic tradition - but also about the *who* of persons.

However, it seems as if there already exists cleavage in the literature that illustrates the difference between *ipse* and *idem* accounts of identity. We find this in the distinction between those authors that take bodily and/or physical continuity to be the criterion for identity[5] and those who put faith in some psychological criteria.[6] (There is also a third account, which focuses on the existence of an immaterial soul, but it is not a major part of the analytic discussion.)[7] Thus, it appears as if the analytic tradition has, in fact, respected the difference between *ipse* and *idem* accounts of identity.

But, according to Ricoeur, both the psychological and physical identity theorists give *idem* answers to *ipse* questions and thereby fail to *properly* attend to the cleavage. He argues that this result is due to the failure to work with examples that highlight the conflict and distinction between *idem* and *ipse*, namely, literary examples. Instead, the strategy in the literature has been to focus on science fiction examples, and modes of reasoning that draw their inspiration from hypothetical and *idem*-aimed examples, to the end of giving *idem* answers to *ipse* questions. Thus, Ricoeur maintains that a proper account of personal identity must first distinguish between the two senses of identity, and then look closely at the point where *idem* and *ipse* meet.

It is ordinary narratives, the kind we find in literary fiction, that provide us with the tools needed to expose the play between *idem* and *ipse*, and then to construct an adequate account of personal identity. Ricoeur maintains that "the puzzling cases posed

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[5] For instance: Wiggins (1967), Williams (1973), and Thomson (1997).

[6] For instance: Shoemaker (1970), Perry (1972), and Nozick (1981).

[7] For example, see Shoemaker and Swinburne, (1984).

by literary fiction tend to separate the question *ipse* from the answer *idem.* In the course of the application of literature to life, what we carry over and transpose into the exegesis of ourselves is this dialectic of the self and the same" (*ibid* 198). Identity crisis is thus a real possibility for subjects in a narrative theory of identity; responsibilities can be overwhelming, rights can be frustrated, and a person's identity can come into question in spite of her having the right relations to her 'past self'.

2. Narrative as a way to Personhood

In discussing the motivations for narrative theories of identity, we are met with an immediate difficulty. It seems as if the self, on the narrative view, is too intimately connected with normative theory to be of any use to those interested in the metaphysics of persons: "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes" (Taylor 3). But, while it is true that the motivation for narrative theories stems, in large part, from the intuition that personhood ought to have something to do with rights and responsibilities, this is not the only way to approach identity. In the next section, I consider an approach from Daniel Dennett that has less of the flavour of metaethics and tastes more like metaphysics. At present, however, I want to sketch the first face of narrative: its heuristic face. And, since much of the heuristic function of narrative is tied to normative theory, we shall have to suspend our appetite for a meaty metaphysics.

It is important to note that the use of 'autobiography' and 'narrative', as ways of knowing identity, are, in a sense, metaphorical. We do not, most times, literally write an autobiography, or recite a narrative of our and others actions. However, we do, literally,

use narrative as a tool for discovering our identity, and the identity of others. In fact, it is an indispensable tool for understanding the actions of others, and by extension, their roles as persons. We use narratives, in a basic sense, to develop a conception of our identities as persons. That is, we tell stories to ourselves about ourselves. When I think to myself "Who am I?" I find that the answer comes in the form of a list of properties, which contain in them, sets of stories about myself. I say, for example, "I am a student" and I am implicitly committed to a story about how I am a student. I recall classes and assignments and schools in stories that are about me. But more important than this is the notion that we maintain a sustained narrative that puts our actions in the context of our personhood. Donald Spence remarks that at "[t]he core of our identity is really a narrative thread that gives meaning to our life, provided that it is never broken" (Spence 143) And, part of this narrative is the notion that we exist in a community with certain physical and normative relations to this community, which in turn constrain the kinds of narratives that we can tell about ourselves.

In "The Narrative as a Root Metaphor in Psychology," Theodore Sarbin argues that "narrative is a fruitful metaphor for examining and interpreting human action" (Sarbin ed. 19). Sarbin points out that a number of authors, both psychologists and philosophers, have convincingly argued that self-narrative is centrally important to understanding moral choice. Crites (1975), Fingarette (1971), and MacIntyre (1984) have argued that we need stories to understand communities as constituted by persons, and persons as constituted by their roles within those communities (*ibid* 20). MacIntyre writes,

> Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources (MacIntyre 201).

When we defend our actions, when we explain our rights, and when we talk about the actions and rights of others, we use narrative to mediate between our normative theory and the actions that follow from that theory. In doing so, we negotiate our roles and identities within our communities. We cannot understand the actions of others, the characters of our communities, or our roles within communities without recourse to narrative. Narrative is thus a heuristic for others to understand our agency: it is a *tool* for explaining our identities to others, and for their interpreting our identities.

Implicit in this moral talk is an account of personhood. When we negotiate our moral roles we develop an account of our person, our identity-as-a-person. These roles are open to negotiation if we get something wrong about our duties and place in the social network. To this extent, we publicly negotiate our identity and personhood. We also negotiate our identity privately in the sense that we construct a narrative by ourselves that would be defensible in a public forum. Kenneth and Mary Gergen explain that we

> select in advance actions that can be justified on the basis of an intelligible or publicly acceptable narrative. In this sense, the bulk of the negotiation process is anticipatory or implicit; it takes place with an imaginary audience prior to the moment of action. People take into account other perspectives and the likelihood of their actions being accepted prior to acting. In this way, most human interaction proceeds unproblematically (Gergen and Gergen, in Hinchman and Hinchman 177).

I wish to acknowledge that the heuristic dimension of narrative is essential for the task of discerning and constructing one's identity within a community. But this is not the only role narrative fills in the play of personal identity: narrative has another face. In the next section I look at narrative as a constituent of identity.

3. Narrative as a Person

In the last section, we looked at the way in which narrative, quite literally, answers the *who* questions about identity; it tells us about the self. This would be somewhat problematic for narrative theorists if the discussion were to stop here. For, the heuristic face of narrative seems only to attend to the evidentiary aspect of the *who* questions. That is, narrative merely tracks certain sets of responsibilities, and actions which attach to things that we call persons. To be sure, these stories mold our persons and create our identities; they change the way we view ourselves, as selves, and produce new identities along the way. But, only in the sense that they tell us which normative facts are attached to which persons, and why. Narratives are therefore, just a way to knowing about the normative character of persons, but the persons themselves, as entities, are still just as mysterious as ever. We are back to Hume's starting point.

> 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 252).

However, we should not be led back into Humean skepticism, not exactly. Narrative in its second guise can play the role of the constituent. Developing a view of narrative as a literal constituent is difficult inasmuch as it requires us to take seriously the idea that the self is fictional, or more accurately, a fiction. But not impossible once we understand that this fiction has its roots in real relations, real communities, and real bodies, and it is a fiction all the same.

The fact, if it is a fact, that persons are fictional objects should not lead us into thinking that they are not real, however. Instead, we should think of persons as being

like, in kind, other fictional objects that have their basis, and utility, in what we like to call the 'real world'. Dennett's suggestion is that we ought to think about personal identity as being akin to centers of gravity.[8] He tells us that

> a center of gravity is not an atom or a subatomic particle or any other physical item in the world. It has no mass; it has no color; it has no physical properties at all, except for spatio-temporal location. It is a fine example of what Hans Reichenbach would call an *abstractum*. It is a purely abstract object (Dennett in Kessel *et al* 275).

And likewise,

> A self is also an abstract object, a theorist's fiction (*ibid*).

The self, like the center of gravity, has for its constituents some theory that tells us how to interpret the physical world we see around us; when we speak about personal identity, the narratives we tell capture our theories of selves. And, Dennett says, there is no sense 'asking after the real, physical, thing that is the self,' any more than there is sense in asking to see a center of gravity. Any demand along these lines would be a category mistake (*ibid*). There are, of course, important differences between selves, centers of gravity, and fictional characters, but these are not differences in kind, he thinks.

Some might object to Dennett on grounds that his account seems to assume the truth of some versions of physicalism. In other words, he has assumed that the only *real* things are those things that exist in physical space and the corollary of this, that all non-physical things are fictional and therefore not real. But, one can plump for narrative theories of identity and not subscribe to physicalism by maintaining that abstract things without physical extension are nevertheless real. The varieties of realism, and antirealism, with regard to fiction are too many to discuss here. However, it is important to note that one can be a realist about the self and still think it a fiction. On this latter view, the self is a fiction, but not *just* a fiction. This is to say that the self has fictional elements, elements

[8] Dennett in Kessel and Johnson eds. (1992).

that are not true in this world, but that these elements do not exhaust the constitution of that self. The narrative self is not obviously physically real, but I would maintain physicality is only a sufficient condition of the real, not a necessary one. The fictions we tell, especially those that develop our identity as persons, are real, and not *mere* fictions; they are better understood as abstractions: narrative structured entities that *must* be attentive to the *de re* facts we take to be true.

But the exact character and constitution of narrative in fiction is fuzzy. In literary criticism, there has been much debate about how to talk about narrative in a way that respects different narrative forms, and illustrates differences between narrators, and narratives, and allows us to find out just 'who' is narrating. For those of us not familiar with the discipline, we might think that a narrative is just a story from a particular point of view. Sometimes the narrative constructed is from the point of view of the protagonist (first-person), sometimes from an omniscient perspective (third-person), sometimes the omniscient narrator follows the protagonist around in a way that limits omniscience (limited-omniscient), and so on. Sometimes we can't trust the narrator, sometimes it seems as if the narrator is another character in the story, but not of the story, somehow outside of the story (fictional author). The permutations of narrative structure in fiction seem to be endless. To minister to these varieties of narration, many have suggested that we ought to think in terms of a narrator, one who tells the story, and a focalizer, the *perspective* that matters to the current line of narration.

In internal focalization, the narrator tells a story 'through the eyes of the focalizer;' in external focalization, the focalizer 'is seen, but never sees' (Genette 72). Our personal narratives seem to be both internal and external: internal in the sense that

we are the teller of our narrative and also the focalizer, and external in the sense that we see others as the focalizers of our narrative; the view from the 'other' helps us to understand our person in terms of our relations to that other, and to our community. What is crucial to our narrative is where the focalizer is located within the community, or more broadly, the environment. Different loci have different sets of actual relations, which make possible normative claims about persons.[9] This is to say that different loci, or situations, have relations that imply moral responsibilities. The problem, it seems, is that there are a very large number of focalizers at all of these loci and no way to unite disparate relations/focalizers into a single identity, at least no way that does not require reidentification criteria.

But we needn't slip back into this way of thinking about identity, for some relations persist in a way that makes them constant themes in a narrative, and others are incidental and do not become themes. Some focalizers are incidental to a plot and others are crucial. My personal narrative links loci together in a way that illustrates and develops my most pervasive relational themes. The salient ones culminate to form the identity of my person. But it is the relations of the loci that are important to identity proper, not the focalizer, which merely gives us purchase on personal identity in virtue of its perspective. An example will help to illustrate this point.

I am a brother. Part of my identity as a person includes this fact. On the narrative theory, I talk about my identity as a brother in the stories that I tell and negotiate with my community. So, when I was two or three I recognized that there was another child that lived in my home, and that she was my sister, and that this meant that I had some

[9] Relational identity has been used in a very specific way to think about the way persons view their identities as connected to social roles, especially domestic roles. See, for instance, Garrido and Acitelli (1999).

additional responsibilities as a budding person. The specific responsibilities have changed over time, but are still directed toward my sibling: as a child (focalizer ß) living in proximity (locus ß) to my sister I had a responsibility to make certain no physical harm came to her, now (locus Δ), I (focalizer Δ) have different responsibilities. My identity as a brother means that these responsibilities will continue to persist. What links the ß focalizer to the Δ focalizer just is a theme in my narrative: siblinghood. The ß - Δ theme is an important part of my personal identity, but is one of many themes that constitute my personhood. Not all of these themes will include responsibilities and norms, though these will, most times, be the interesting ones to us as persons.

4. The Two Faces of Narrative

In the last section I argued that there is nothing in addition to the themes that form my narrative, which is the sole constituent of my self. This means that our identities as persons are, in part, *de dicto*, and not wholly *de re*. If one has difficulty with this conclusion, he has another recourse. He might, for example, take the physical relations which support the narrative themes of my person to be my *de re* identity. (After all, these are implied by the *de dicto* account.) This is one way to talk about personhood, but it comes with a price. If we move toward this *de re*, some might say "*idem*," account of identity, we lose any response we may have had to the extreme claim. That is, if we maintain that our story is our self, then we have a way to meet the contention that there is no reason to care about our future selves, something that is unavailable to the *de re* account, whether it be physicalist, or a variety of psychological continuity. That is, we have a story that belongs to us because we are a part of making it. Other criteria for

personhood are not ours in the same way: they are structures that have little connection (as structures) to our selves.

But, if it turns out that our selves are abstractions, why should we care about our future circumstances, and future focalizers? Well, in part we care about these things insofar as they might be situations in which our narration ends, and we want the story, most times, to continue.[10] Notice however, that an end to our story is not necessarily the end of our lives altogether, for our stories are told, and retold, after our death. In the sense that our stories live on after we stop narrating, we too live on after death. Are we still persons? Not fully. Personhood seems to require the two faces of narration: it requires that one both have a story and be engaged in its interpretation and preservation. Most of the themes that constitute our person become static, or begin to change radically, or dissolve with the dissolution of our physical bodies. We might still be partial, or quasi, persons *for* someone else, but I think that this existence is closer to being a psychological artifact, than a person.

As I tell my story, my narrative is revealed; so too is my identity, my personhood, revealed in my telling. And the telling reveals my self to myself, and others; and the story is myself. And in understanding this story, I understand myself. In this way, narrative has two faces with respect to identity; it creates, sustains, and develops our identities, and it is a way *to* these identities for us, and for others; it is a constituent and heuristic of personal identity.

But this is not where the story ends. There is a great deal of work to be done on the relation between communities and persons needed to develop a comprehensive view

[10] Sometimes we might want the story to end. In those fictions where the chief characters decline into depravity, or insanity, we are glad to say that those characters are not us. In this way, many of us would want our stories to end sooner if the alternative would be insanity followed by death.

of how narrative functions as a constituent in multi-dimensional, 'multi-authored,' settings. We can see the beginning of this work in communitarian political theory, but there is certainly more to be said on this count. Moreover, there are additional points to be made about how narrative theories of identity [in terms of focalization] have the resources to further explicate, and respond to, the extreme claim. These are both exercises for another time. It has been my aim here to sketch the two faces of narrative in narrative theories of personal identity. In this, I have begun to open up the field in such a way that narrative does more than work nicely for an evidentiary account of identity. Additionally, I have shed some light on the self as an abstract, non-physical, entity, and hope to have provided an initial response to critics of the narrative account of identity. This thesis may form the foundations for responding to other problems with personal narratives and identity, but this is beyond the scope of my interests at present. My interest now is in pushing the constituent function of narrative to its limits to see if it can support a theory of identity for non-conscious objects.

Chapter Two

The Narrative Identities of Things

Abstract

In the first chapter, I argued that narrative is both a constituent and heuristic of personal identity: we use narrative to discover our own identities, and the identities of others, and our narratives constitute our person. In this chapter, I argue that narrative is likewise a constituent of the identity of non-conscious particulars, and a heuristic for our knowing about these identities. First, I look at the two competing theories about the identity of non-conscious particulars as well as some of their various failings. I then argue that narrative is a constituent, too, of non-conscious particulars, not in the sense that particulars create self-stories but that their identity is narrative in structure. More broadly, that identity is constituted relationally, and this relational constitution is essentially narrative.

0. Introduction

The chief difficulty in giving a comprehensive account of personal identity lies in our discerning a feature that grounds identity through change. (This is, in fact, the chief difficulty for any theory of identity.) If we give up the idea that a person has a soul that preserves identity (personhood) over time, we must say something about the relation between an individual at t_1, and an individual at t_2, that makes the latter the *same* individual as the former. Furthermore, this relation cannot be an identity relation in the sense that ∂ at $t_1$shares the property of identity with ∂ at t_2, as this would be viciously circular. Instead, the challenge demands that we come up with a criterion that exclusively sorts ∂'s into individual persons; we need a criterion that tells us why ∂ at t_2 is the same ∂ as that ∂ at t_1.

The response in the literature to this difficulty comes in three main variations. There are those who defend some account of personal identity that is predicated on the existence of an immaterial soul, pushing identity problems into the realm of epistemology. There are those who say that having the same body over time is what preserves the character of identity, thereby pushing the problems into the realm of objects. And then there are those that take psychological similarity or continuity to be the criterion of identity. It is into this latter group that narrative theories of personhood fall. However, unlike most psychological theories of personhood, narrative theorists do not try to specify a relation that two psychological states share which constitutes personhood. Instead, they take time (and change) by the horns, as it were, and say that our stories, our narratives, those things which are essentially *in* time, are the defining features of our identities as persons.

In the last chapter, I argued that narrative plays two parts in the construction of our identity. In one sense, stories help us to understand ourselves (and others) as persisting entities, and they help us understand our place within the broader spectrum of our community and environment. This is the sense in which narrative functions as a heuristic of our identity: it helps us to know about personhood. But more than this, our narratives are actually the constituents of our personhood. The stories we tell, that we negotiate with our communities, *are* our persons. These are stories about bodies, and psychological states, and numerous other things that are important to us as persons. They capture what is important to persons *qua* persons: our sense of self preservation and survival, our right to compensation, our responsibilities, and perhaps most important, our relations with others.

The narrative view of identity is intuitively appealing because it grants a kind of ownership to the individual and is grounded in the actual features of their world. We construct our identities with the help of actual members of our community, conscious and non-conscious alike. This means that there are certain restrictions on the kinds of persons we are, have been, and will become; personhood is constrained by the conditions under which we are born and live. (Heideggarians have called this our "thrownness," the sense in which our identities begin to be shaped before we have an active hand in their shaping, before, in fact, we have a human body.) In sum, the fact that I am me, and not someone else, matters for narrative theories of identity.[11] But more than this, narrative is intuitive because it takes seriously our sense that identity is constituted by a system of

[11] In response to worries about identities being fictional, and thereby not real, this feature of narrative theories is a kind of hyper-realism: the actual facts of the world matter for identity; identity is not pronounced in a vacuum.

relations, not just *some* relation between ∂ at t_1 and ∂ at t_2. (And, after all, we like to think that there is not just one defining feature of our persons.)

In narrative theories of identity, perspective matters. Perspective matters in the sense discussed above, *viz.*, that my perspective on my life and my community matters to my identity and the kind of person I am now and will become. But perspective matters in another sense too, in the sense that we occupy particular loci within our environment that inform, nay constitute, identity.

At every point in the timeline of my life, I take features of my environment as central to the story that I tell about myself; I must attend to reality. Schechtman calls this the "reality constraint" (*op. cit.*). She maintains that my narrative, for instance, mustn't be in constant conflict with what my community takes to be true. Sometimes these conflicts are errors of fact, which do not harm a person's standing in the community (as a person). However, when errors abound in a person's narrative, personhood is under threat. This is the sense in which loci constitute personhood: the relations of the features of my environment must be 'written' into my narrative in a way that respects reality.

If it is true that the particular physical relations between me and my environment constitute my identity, some might conclude that personhood is made up of only *these* relations, and has nothing whatever to do with [pure] psychological facts.[12] In other words, narratives supervene on physical relations, and it is the physical ones that are constitutive. At the end of the first chapter I protested against taking this reductive line on persons because it is what we say about these relations that matters to personhood; it is how we interpret facts as they pertain to us that constitutes persons *as we know them.* We could construct narratives from these systems of physical relations alone, but if we

[12] By psychological fact, I do not mean facts about the structure and actions of our brains.

dispense with the psychological component of narrative, we lose one of the most intuitive components of persons, namely, their ability to give their subjects ownership of their identity.[13] In the case of my personhood, it seems more palatable to allow me to help construct a narrative that sorts and selects the relations that are a crucial part of my identity.

In the case of non-conscious particulars, these psychological facts are unavailable. Moreover, many of us assume that the rights, responsibilities, self-interested concern for survival, and self-interested concern for compensation, are not at issue when we turn our attention to the identity of non-conscious particulars. Nevertheless, particulars have perspectives, which is to say that they occupy specific loci, and therefore, they have a set of unique relations to their environment. But if relations constitute identity, it seems as if particulars have too many relations, the whole world must constitute every particular.[14] And this is an unfortunate consequence because it seems to entail that there is just one thing, the world, and no particular things.[15] However, we should not take this last concern to be a defeater of all relational accounts of identity; we have a means of selecting among systems of relations and preserving identity: narrative.

Narrative was able to sort relations in the case of personal identity, (which involves particular bodies as well as psychological facts), and may be able to likewise select among the relations of non-conscious particulars. In this chapter, I consider two popular accounts of particulars, the substance, (or substratum) theory and the bundle

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[13] Sometimes we do adopt this procedure of substituting *de re* relations for *de dicto* personhood - for instance, when we need to make decisions about humans who are unable to voice their narratives, and own their persons publicly.

[14] I'm using 'world' in the 'possible world' sense.

[15] This is a variation of F.H. Bradley's criticism of relational accounts of identity; see Ross (1980). More on this in Sections III and VI.

theory, and describe their shortcomings. I then present my views on the identity of particulars: I argue that particulars are constituted by relations that have a narrative structure. I then spend the rest of the chapter discussing the advantages of my view, over the substance and bundle theories.

1. Two Theories of Particulars

How should we think about the identities of everyday objects? What is it about a particular that makes it the same particular over time? [16] Academic discussion on this subject has tended to focus on the difference between universals and particulars and questions about how particulars can exist in time, how particulars can change, and remain the same thing. No doubt, this discussion has been directed by the foremost influence in Western philosophy, Plato, and his penchant for worrying about universals and epistemology. However, my interest at present is not the relation of universals to particulars, their instantiation in time and so on, but rather the constitution of particulars. There are two main views about the constitution of particulars. The first, usually attributed to Locke, and early Aristotle, claims that the identity of particulars is to be found in their substance, or substratum, an immaterial thread to which worldly properties are tied. The second, famously articulated by the later Russell, has it that particulars are constituted by universal properties that stand in a peculiar relation to one another, which he calls "compresence." I'll take each in turn with their peculiar shortcomings.

[16] When I speak of particulars, I mean naturally occurring objects. Although, strictly speaking, non-conscious particulars should include artifacts of art and technology, for simplicity's sake, I shall focus on natural objects. For more on technology and art, see the penultimate section of Chapter 4.

i. Substance Theories

When we speak of ordinary objects, we tend to think in terms of the object and its properties. Suppose we examine a rubber ball, to take a common example, and find that it is red, a quarter kilogram, smooth, and slightly scented.[17] We can say that redness, for instance, is predicated of the ball; that all of the properties, in fact, which give the ball its particular quality, are predicated of the ball. What supports these properties, in Locke's terminology, is a *substratum*: a bare substance to which all of the ball's properties attach.[18] This view might strike us as strange, for it says that every particular is composed of "substance" and properties which attach to this substance. But the intuitive pull of this view is revealed to be strong when we consider properties as necessary or accidental.

Suppose we want to specify which, if any, of the properties of our red, rubber, ball are essential to it; which properties are necessary. Can we take away any one of the properties of the ball and have it remain the *same* ball? Surely not. If any of the part of an object is changed, then it couldn't be the same object, not in the strict sense anyway. But this runs counter to our ordinary intuitions regarding accidental properties. That is, it seems clear that the ball *could* have been different: some of the ball's properties must not be essential to its being, *per se*. What then could preserve identity through change; how

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[17] This is Michael Loux's example; see Chapter 6 of Loux (1978).

[18] For more on substance theories, see Aristotle's Metaphysics, Z.3 and Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, esp. II.xxiii.6., *op. cit.* Aristotle and Locke actually differ on substance and predication. Whereas, for Aristotle, not all properties are attached to a substance (the property of being a substance is one), Locke has it that all properties are attached to a single substance. To make matters worse, there is some dispute surrounding Aristotle's presentation on substance in this section of the Metaphysics. That is, whether the presentation is of his own view, or one under consideration. Typically, Aristotle's view of bare matter that most resembles Locke's is taken to be found in the Categories, not the Metaphysics. However, given that he develops views on "matter" in the Physics, I think it better to look to the Metaphysics for comparison with Locke, even though the view under consideration there may not be his own.

can our ball be the same ball if we change some of its properties? It is substance, "bare substratum" in Locke, and "matter" in Aristotle, that preserves identity over time. And thus, the identity of a particular is constituted first, necessarily, and essentially, by its substance, and then by the accidental properties attached to this substance.

The chief difficulty with this view is that it does not respond to empiricist concerns about the existence of substance. Since substance is, as Locke notes, essentially unknowable, many think the substance theory of particulars to be at best a violation of Occam's Maxim, and at worst, question begging and viciously circular. The more charitable critics of this view may point out that we can get along just fine by thinking of the properties of a thing as being the only, and essential, constituents of the object. This is a naive bundle theory. The bare articulation of this latter view comes with the drawback that all of the properties of our ball are essential to its being *that* ball, a consequence we may not want to accept in order to preserve our Occammian intuitions. But one needn't appeal to Occam in order to refute the substance view. Instead, we might argue that the substance account has the 'appearance of a closed curve in space.'

As I noted above, an identity criterion, that which preserves identity over time, that which is shared by some object ß at t_1 and ß' at t_2, cannot be an identity relation. one cannot argue that ß and ß' share the property of identity and that this is what makes them one and the same ß because this would be question begging. Similarly, one cannot specify that ß and ß' share the same substance and are therefore the same thing. So, we may reject the substance view on these grounds, or on the grounds that we do not need substance, or on the grounds that, as Russell says, 'the introduction of an unknowable

should be avoided wherever possible.'[19] I'll return to these worries. First, however, I'll sketch the bundle theory of particulars.

ii. Bundle Theories

According to the later Russell, particulars are bundles of properties, with no matter, bare substratum, or substance to which they attach: the ball is simply the bundle of roundness, with redness, with rubber-scentedness, etc.[20] More accurately, for Russell particulars are bundles of universal properties, which stand in a primitive, unanalyzable, relation to one another called "compresence." I share Loux's sympathies. He says, "[when] confronted with these two theories, it is difficult not to be sympathetic with the bundle theory; for whatever our antecedent epistemological views, the suggestion that [particulars] incorporate intrinsically unpropertied constituents is bound to arouse our suspicions" (Loux 115).[21] But more than this, I prefer the bundle view because it seems to put relations at the forefront of identity. However, the bundle theory is not without its own difficulties.

While compresence (no less universal) seems in just as much need of explanation as substance, bundle theorists need not subscribe to Russell's account. One could tell any story one wished about how properties are bundled. But, irrespective of how we articulate the constitutive nature of the bundle, the bundle theory faces a number of

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[19] Russell (1996).

[20] See for example Russell (1995).

[21] Loux often uses "substance" to refer to a particular object. I've replaced Loux's "substance" here with "particular" for clarities sake.

challenges. Loux suggests that these concerns are best captured by the four following objections:

> Objection I: The bundle theorist cannot account for the contingency of [particulars.]
>
> Objection II: The bundle theorist cannot make sense of identity through change.
>
> Objection III: The bundle theorist must construe all true statements ascribing properties to [particulars] as tautologous.
>
> Objection IV: The bundle theorist is committed to the truth of the Identity of Indiscernibles (*ibid* 116-7).

In the chapter following that where Loux gives the objections above, he responds on behalf of the bundle theorist. Bundle theories can, he says, avoid the first objection by maintaining that, although the bundles may be bundles of universals, the relation of compresence is contingent; it is an accident that particulars come into being. For the second objection, Loux suggests that the bundle theorist can maintain that all of the properties in a bundle are necessary, and that change is nonetheless made possible by appealing to something very close to identity, to something he calls "sameness." Sameness occurs when two objects share all properties at t_1, but only most at t_2. (Notice the similarity here to the "closest continuer" psychological view in the personal identity literature.) The concession that the bundle theorist makes to avoid the second objection is far from minor for it commits him to a theory of diachronic identity that is closer to diachronic similarity than identity, *senso stricto*. I will return to this shortly; first however, I want to look at responses to the third and fourth objections.

The reply to the third objection in Loux is somewhat more complex than are the first two. Loux thinks that the objection – that all true statements about particulars are tautologous – can be got around if the bundle theorist is willing to commit to a particular

theory of reference that limits the set of tautologous sentences. I shall provide a similar response.

Suppose that we say something true about the red, rubber, ball, for instance, (S) "The ball is red." The objection maintains that because, according to the bundle theory, this sentence is tautologous, that it is true in all possible words, or necessarily true, there must be something wrong with the bundle theory. After all, contingent identity statements should be possible. But the bundle theorist may maintain that (S) is true and not tautologous. In fact, the only *de re* necessity is that the ball is so named "ball." In another world the ball is called something else, but nevertheless, we have designated "ball" as a rigid designator and it is a *de re* necessary term. In other words, (S') "The ball is the ball" is necessarily true. But this need not be the case for "is red." We *could* add "is red" as a rigid designator, but there is nothing about the bundle theory that requires this. In other words, (S) could be false; the ball could be blue. Moreover, (S'') "The ball could have been blue" is not a necessary truth, although it happens to be true in this world.

The fourth and final criticism Loux offers is somewhat more damaging to the bundle theorist. Recall that the proponent of the fourth objection claims that the bundle theorist must be committed to the truth of the identity of indiscernibles because it is possible for two different particulars to have the same set of constituents. If the critic is right, then the bundle theorist must conclude that two particulars with identical constituents are one and the same thing, that they are numerically identical. Loux notes that some, such as Berkeley, Hume, and D. C. Williams, have taken a nominalistic line and maintained that no two particulars really can have the same constituents (*ibid* 131).

This strategy, of course, invites a number of difficulties having to do with how universals are instantiated in particulars, on the one hand, and with the nature of necessity on the other.[22] Another response can be made on grounds that particulars have their constitution only in relation to other particulars. This requires that we differentiate between, what Loux calls, "pure" and "unpure" properties. Pure properties are those that do not involve other particulars, such as redness, or wisdom. Unpure properties, sometimes called Cambridge properties, are relational and include other particulars, for example, the property of being ten kilometres from Cambridge. But the use of relation, or any 'unpure,' properties invites a number of other difficulties, not the least of which seems to be that all particulars end up having the same pure properties, since every particular is named in the set of all unpure properties for any given particular: this is, in essence, Bradley's problem, the worry that there is just one thing, and not many. Russell, Loux notes, takes neither of these responses, but argues that the fourth objection fails to distinguish between *physical* space and time, on the one hand, and *perceptual* space and time on the other. [23]

In brief, Russell maintains that the perceptual difference between indiscernibles gives us reason to suppose that apparent indiscernibles must have differing pure properties. He argues that we attach the properties of a particular to perceptually tensed and placed objects such as "the particular in the center of my visual field." Loux is not impressed. He notes that his perceptual differences are neither necessary nor unique to the particulars, and nor are the sets of properties of particulars still pure when they include reference to perceptual and tensed indices. Objection four is successful, it seems,

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[22] For further explanation, see Loux (*op. cit.*).

[23] Russell (2005).

and therefore, the bundle theorist is committed to the truth of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. I'll comment more on this last consequence for bundle theorists in the following section. First however, I shall show how narrative identity applies in the case of particulars.

2. Narrative Particulars

In the last chapter, I developed a relational account of personhood by arguing that narrative is a constituent of personal identity and that narratives are focalized through specific loci, which are the spaces (roles) that human bodies inhabit. The unique themes of these narratives that persist through change in loci are those that make up what we call "persons." The general features of our community, and to a lesser extent, our environment, are written into the narratives that we construct and negotiate. We capture our relations to our environment in the stories we tell. These relations alone could not exhaust our identities as persons, for it is the normative import that we assign to these relations that matters to personal identity; it is what we say of our person, and others, that is paramount to the constitutions of selves: the most important parts of personhood is *de dicto*.

In this section, I want to apply the narrative theory of identity to the identity of particulars: particulars are constituted by their relations to the world, and their identities are essentially narrative. Narrative was able to pick out the *salient* normative relations in the construction of persons, so perhaps it can pluck out the salient relations for non-psychological particulars as well. I shall need to modify the view I developed in the first chapter because I do not want to argue that it is what particulars 'say' that matters to their

identity; the identities of particulars are not *de dicto*. Rather, I shall argue that the identity of a particular is constituted by a *de re* narrative.

On Russell's view, particulars are constituted by a set of universal properties that are specially related to one another. On my view, particulars are constituted by a set of relations that are selected by the thing's narrative. A stone, for example, is constituted by its relations to the world. But these relations are not between the stone, as a persisting entity, and the world – not exactly. In other words, we cannot suppose that relations exist between the stone and the world because this would be to presuppose a notion of identity (the stone's identity) to begin. Instead, I suggest that our model begin with loci that are constituted by relations, which are co-present with particulars. The dimensions of any given locus will be constituted, wholly, by the world around it. Likewise, the stone is constituted by the relations that constitute the locus with which it is co-present. Like persons, there are some relations that persist and are important to the identity of the stone. These persistent relations make up the themes that comprise the narrative that constitutes the stone's identity. What makes the stone the 'same' stone over time is the narrative structure of the stone's relations.

When we narrate our lives, we do so by adopting the perspective of a focalizer that is co-present with a discrete locus, which is shaped by the world itself. Can we do this with the stone? Yes, but our reflections and stories would only be *de dicto* constituents of the stone's identity, coloured by our psychologies.[24] But one might also complain that it seems problematic to even suggest that a thing has a perspective, irrespective of whether we adopt it or not. On this point, Stephen Ross has this to say:

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[24] However, the fact that we can do this is evidence for the natural occurrence of narrative structure, and narrative identities of particulars. More on these evidentiary niceties below.

> The notion of perspective has connotations of a percipient subject viewing the world from his particular standpoint. Yet we may speak of "perspectives on a subject matter" or "various perspectives toward an object" without reference to a person or his views. In order to avoid the experiential connotations of the word "perspective," yet to preserve the sense that a being is what it is in virtue of the perspectives it denies, I have spoken of being as *ordinal.* Anything whatsoever is an order of constituents. A further advantage is that the spatial suggestions of the word "perspective" are avoided (Ross 127).

At present, I am concerned only with giving an account for particular, physical, objects, and so I'm not troubled by the "spatial suggestions of the word 'perspective'." In fact, on my view, the spatial concept of relationally-constituted locus is paramount.

In the construction of personhood, we negotiate publicly, or privately, our identities in communities. Our stories are told and modified and rewritten, and as this happens, we carve out a place for ourselves in our community; we create and define the roles that are implied by our identity, which are parts of our identity. Likewise, the stone's narrative carves out its identity by sorting and selecting relational properties: narrative precises the "space" in which the stone exists and in this precises identity. Consider the following for example:

> Before the stone was the stone that it is now, it was part of a boulder in the middle of a river. During a storm, a larger boulder tumbled down the river and smashed into the smaller boulder breaking off a number of stones. One stone was carried down the river and deposited on the river bed under a weeping willow. Over the eons, this stone was worn down in the rain, and when the river was high. Now the stone has turned into a pebble embedded in the silt of the river delta.

This story is one theme, and one constituent narrative of the identity of the stone. According to this story, the stone is not the boulder, nor is it the pebble. But, the identity of the stone would be different if the story were written differently because it would specify or imply a different set of relations. This story selects the relations that make the particular, the stone, just the stone that it is and not some other with identical characteristics.[25]

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[25] I shall discuss this last point in more detail in the fourth section and show how the narrative view avoids Loux's fourth objection to Russell's bundle theory.

The story above is just part of the total set of constituent narratives of the stone's identity; it only picks out some of the relations that constitute the particular. The story that lists totality of all the stone's relations would not tell us much about the stone's identity. But the one we have here is sufficient to demonstrate how it is that the stone exists over time, how it is that identity is preserved through change. Identity is contingent on the narrative that is 'told' *by the stone*. This is important to note. When I talk about narrative as the constituent of identity of particulars, it is not *our* story that matters. The stone's story, its composite themes of relation, those that it has in virtue of the particular loci included in the story *is* its identity *as a stone*.[26] This tale is a natural fact, one we translate into English. And, while it is necessary, *de re*, that one story maps to one identity, objects have many stories, many sets of ordered relations, and many identities.

The chief advantage of my view, over say bundle theorists like Russell, is that the properties that get assigned to the stone through their relations are tensed (or indexed): they exist in time. And this means that modification of bundles can be identity-preserving in the most rigorous sense of diachronic identity. I shall discuss this, and other advantages over the bundle theory of identity in the fifth section. First, however, I want to meet the challenge that has historically caused the most trouble for the substance theory of particulars.

[26] It can have other identities too, functional identities for example, but I save discussion of these for the last chapter.

3. Empirical Worries

The single worry that has led to the decline in popularity of what I have called the "substance view of particulars" has its roots in empiricist thought, perhaps best illustrated in Hume's Treatise (*op. cit.)*. The empiricist intuition is that because we have no way of knowing about bare substance, substrata, or matter, we should not think its employ a legitimate strategy for dissolving problems of identity over time. With regard to particular narratives some might raise a similar worry. I said above that the stone's narrative was a natural kind, that narrative identity was a *de re* necessity, and that we can translate this "natural narrative" into English. But one might wonder if I have just fallen into the same trap that snared metaphysisists past by supposing that we have access to something just because we *associate* narrative with particular identities. This worry doesn't apply to persons, because we can ask after their narratives, their identities.[27] But, we have no similar procedure for asking the stone to tell its narrative, and thus no reason to suppose that it exists.

In the first chapter, I discussed narrative as both a constituent and heuristic of personhood. In the case of particulars, narrative is likewise a constituent and heuristic of identity. However, given that I've specified that particulars are non-conscious, narrative can only be a heuristic *for us*. This means that we have a response, in principle, to the empiricist objection. I offer the following example to illustrate how narrative operates as heuristic to help us know about the narrative identities of things.

> On a trip to the convenience store, my partner recognized a pink post-it note on the pavement outside the store.
>
> She said, "Look at this."
>
> I nodded and said, "Yes, this is the same one that we had in our apartment earlier."

[27] In fact, this "articulation constraint" is an important criteria for Schechtman's view of persons.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"I saw it attached to Mike's jacket when we left the apartment earlier. I decided not to say anything about it and let it remain on his sleeve. I suppose it must have fallen off here when we were at the store earlier."

How did I know that the note was the same one that once took residence in my apartment? I told a story to myself, and my partner, about the post-it. In this story I detailed the relations that selected that post-it and only that post-it. I may have been mistaken about the identity of the note, but I could not have been mistaken about what identity consists in: narrative structure.

Suppose I was wrong in my identifying the post-it as the one from my apartment, and that it was actually a post-it attached to a passing car, the strength of its glue expiring in front of the convenience store. The physical structure of the car's post-it is different, though indistinguishable, from my own, but this is not what is crucial to its being the particular it is. Rather, it is the fact that the car-post-it was involved in a different set of relations, a different story that gives it a different identity than my own. The story that selects the car-identity need not refer to the physical constitution of the post-it, this is not important metaphysically speaking. The salient facts about the identity of the car-post-it, those that make it the case that it is not [numerically] identical to the post-it I took it to be, are just those diachronic relations that are tracked by narrative.

In the case of narrative we are intimately connected with the constituent identity of particulars because narrative is a constituent of *our* identities. And because narrative is both a heuristic and constituent of personhood, and because we are able to decide on the character and exact structure of what we ordinarily refer to as "our person," narrative is not nearly the metaphysical mystery that substance is. Yet, we must be careful not to

suppose this to mean that whatever narrative we tell about a particular object is constitutive of that object's identity; this is not meant as an idealist theory of identity. The narratives of objects are *naturally occurring*. And, while it is true that there are facts about our psychologies that make us good story-tellers, it is not *our* story that constitutes the stone. Rather, there are natural narrative structures that constitute the identity of objects. It is merely that we are better at discovering these structures than we are at divining the presence of substance. This is the limit of our use of narrative as a heuristic for-us for discerning the identity of things. Now, I return to the constituent function of narrative, and show my advantage over Russell and the bundle theorists.

4. Loux's Return: Worries about Diachronic Identity and Indiscernible Identicals

In the last section, I showed the advantage of narrative theories of identity have over theories predicated on an immaterial substance. The chief advantage lies in the fact that narrative is available *to us* in a way that substance is not. That is, there are empirical procedures designed for understanding and detecting narrative that are only weakly applied in the case of substance. In this section, I wish to compare my view to that of Russell and the bundle theorists. The narrative theory may afford more intuitive responses to Loux's first and third objections, however, I shall leave these aside as they are not thought, by Loux or myself, to militate against the bundle theory. I shall focus instead on Loux's second and fourth objections: respectively, the worry that the bundle theory cannot account for diachronic identity and the worry that the bundle theorist is committed to the truth of the identity of indiscernibles.

Though it is tempting to give a full blown account of diachronic identity in

terms of narrative, I shall restrict my comments to demonstrating a plausible means of responding to worries about identity over time. Russell has some difficulty in accounting for change because he is committed to the view that particulars are composites of universals, which are themselves usually thought to be unchanging. Narrative, however, is essentially *in time* and therefore should provide us with a way of dealing with diachronic identity.

Recall that Russell, and other bundle theorists, are forced to say something like ß is identical with ß' just in case at t_1 they shared the same bundle. Because identity is had in the completed bundle, it seems as if bundle theorists cannot say how particulars can gain and lose properties without becoming new objects. The narrative theory, on the other hand, takes dynamic relations as being central to the identity of a thing. And because of this, identity is always in a state of flux, and diachronic identity isn't the problem it is for more 'static' theories of identity. There is certainly more to say on just how the narrative theory selects identities in light of the fact that the limits of identity are not statically defined, but I shall save this discussion for the final chapter. Now, we move on to Loux's fourth objection to Russell.

According to Loux, Russell must be committed to the truth of the identity of indiscernibles. But before moving into a discussion of the narrative response to Loux's worry, I should precise the character of the objection. There are two senses in which identicals could be indiscernible: epistemically or metaphysically. Epistemically speaking, we may not be able to tell that two similar things are in fact numerically different. This is not the issue that interests me here. On the metaphysical version of the problem, it is a trivial fact that we can distinguish between the two objects, that we can

see that one is not the other. But we want to know what it is about the constituents of one that *makes* it different from some similar other. Metaphysically, when we say that two things have identical bundles of properties, universals, or whatever we think are the constituents of the bundle, we need not say that they are the same thing. Yet, Russell must say just this because there is nothing else that distinguishes one particular from another.

As Loux notes, there are a few ways that bundle theorists can try to respond to this: they can claim that there are no universal properties and that every bundle is unique, or that things are constituted by relational properties. The former response does not, I think, take the initial problem seriously because it denies the possibility of metaphysical identicals; the nominalist is not owed any returns for his particularist investment because it implies that there are no indiscernibles to begin with, that every particular is of a unique type.[28] The latter category of responses, to which the narrative theory belongs, can account for the numerical difference of two things which, at different times, have the same constituent properties.[29] It does this just by maintaining that the relational properties of things cannot be identical at some t_1 because this would mean that they inhabit the same locus. Further, that if two objects occupy the same space, they must not be empirically distinguishable and the two cannot be numerically different. But, if we know in advance that two things differ numerically, then we know that their relation constitutions must also differ. In the narrative theory thematic identicals may, at different

[28] Another implication is that we must give up any views regarding universals being instantiated in particular things.

[29] For instance, imagine two identical spheres rotating around a point in space, equidistant from this point and both moving at the same velocity.

times, have the same constitution. Yet, I am not committed to the absurd conclusion that they are numerically identical.

However, the relational theories of identity, narrative theories included, meet another problem: namely, that all particulars end up having the same "pure properties." Worse than this is Bradley's version of the problem, *viz.*, if we include relata in the identity of a given particular, every particular will have the same constituents, and there will seem no good reasons to suppose that there is any more than one thing.

5. Bradley's Worry

Two objections seem most demanding when it comes to narrative theories of things. The first I've already dealt with: the objection that narrative doesn't get at the constituents of identity, but only at what we say about particulars and their identity. My response, simply put, is that the narrative identities of things are natural narratives 'written' *de re* in the fabric of whatever we choose for our basic physical part (atoms or smaller). It is narrative that selects the salient *de re* facts in an environment and thereby determines the identity of particulars within this environment. This ability to pick out salient thematic components is what gives narrative a purchase of which other theories of particulars fail to make use. The second objection is one endemic to all relational theories of identity. This is, loosely speaking, Bradley's worry: if every individual thing is relationally constituted, then we have not a collection of individual things, but only one thing. Particulars, then, are merely parts of a single object.

I say that our stone is constituted by the relations it has with its environment. Further, that the stone's narrative collects the right sorts of constituent relations to

determine, and preserve, the character of the stone's identity. Most relations will be two place predicates; one of these relations might be that "the stone is smaller than our Sun." The implication is just that the Sun is constituted in the same way, such that all relations and particulars get included in the stone's narrative, if only by extension. What, then, is there to distinguish between the Sun and stone? Will not it be the case that the Sun and stone have all of the same relational properties? Is there not just one world and one particular identity, one world narrative?

There is a difference between history and narrative. From what I make of it, the difference goes something like this: history is a story (fragmented though it may seem) from a present perspective (or locus) and focalizes through the present locus, while narrative focalizes through past loci. This means that some histories include narratives, and are narrative, whereas others are not; some adopt the perspective of past loci and some do not. If the "world narrative" focalizes through all perspectives at once and includes all relations as constituents it seems more like a lyric than a narrative; more universal than particular. But if this narrative divides into small, particular, narratives embedded within this very large set of relations, then it must be that there are many things, and not just one.

Yet, the problem remains. I must now say what it is that divides up our world narrative. And, whatever I respond with cannot be predicated on some psychological facts about ourselves, for this would be to undermine my metaphysical leanings and force me into idealism.

Notice, however, that it will be narrative itself, not this narrative or that narrative, which divides as it selects salient relations. From the perspective of the stone, its loci

relations that name proximate entities are more relevant to the identity of the stone than are relations to non-proximate entities, or ideas for that matter. And, although the relations between the Sun and stone may be transitive, the extensions of natural facts we might generate are irrelevant to the first order relations (those between the Sun and stone) that are important to the stone's perspective and identity. *A fortiori*, the stone will be smaller than anything larger than the Sun, but this fact will not be included, I think, as one of the natural facts of the stone's narrative. When narrative carves the identity of the stone, it does so only on a first order level, all of the other implicit relations are unnecessary. Second order narratives would not be about the stone, *per se*, but about the features of the stone's world, a tangent to the stone's identity.

6. Conclusion

In the next chapter, I shall take up a number of challenges to my view and attempt to defend the thesis I've presented here. I want to conclude this chapter with some reflections about narrative, natural kinds, and natural kind semantics, in order to precise the role of narrative in identity, and preface some of the worries to come.

What are natural kinds? This question is not so easily answered, but a suitable response usually begins with some reflections on biological taxonomy since, if there are natural kinds, they must be those things nature sorts into species. We might say that lemons are natural kinds, nature (the particular relations between lemon genes and the environment) makes lemons a kind, whether we choose to recognize it or not. Constructed things, such as technological artifacts, are not natural kinds, and neither, we think, are persons or other individual things. The narratives of particulars however, those

sets of relations salient to the differentiation and maintenance of one thing as *that thing*, are, in a sense, natural kinds. But the term "kind" should not be applied without caution, because it is not obviously true that particulars are kinds at all. There might be a master narrative of "lemon" that picks out the salient relations, which make lemons lemons and not oranges and not anything else. But, a particular narrative involves more than these basic sets of relations. Instead, a particular narrative includes relations between *this* lemon and everything else. So, to say that the particular narrative is a natural kind is only to say that we do not create it, but it is a *de re* necessity of whatever world we are in.

Recall the third objection Loux raises against Russell and the bundle theorists: that any true statements, ascribing properties to particulars, will be tautologous. If, however, we think that the narratives of non-conscious particulars are natural kinds, we ought not worry about the tautologous nature of their component "sentences." We shan't worry because all of the properties that create a natural kind are necessary to that kind - the fact that lemons are football shaped is contingent, but the fact that lemons are lemon-shaped is not. It is a *de re* consequent of the extant relations that shaped the natural kind "lemon" that they are so shaped. When it comes to particulars, *this* lemon, or *that* lemon, the statements in its narrative are necessary to its being that particular, but not tautologous in the sense that they will always be true of *that* lemon.

Narratives, particular narratives, (kind narratives if we wish) are natural kinds. It would be an error to think, however, that narrative is a natural kind or that identity is a natural kind, for that matter. But relations are natural kinds, they must be if we are to sustain the conception of natural kinds in terms of the relations between things and the environment. And it is in the realization of these things, that we are brought back to the

consideration of universals that lends credence to Aristotelian conceptions of universality, instead of, say, Platonic or neo-Platonic thought. This may be a consequence of my nominalism, or it may be a consequence of my general approach, *viz.*, to look at particulars *as they are* and to try to say something general about their identities. At any rate narrative may be adapted, as a criterion for identity, to Plato's contention about the interaction of the forms with nature and the mind, but explaining this is not my focus at present.

Having defended the narrative theory of identity against the most pressing objections, I now move on to discuss some secondary objections. In the next chapter, I revisit some stronger versions of the above objections and introduce some novel worries. In my responses to these worries I hope to both clarify my initial position, and begin to show the robust nature of narrative theories to dissolve persistent worries that trouble the identity literature.

Chapter Three

Objections and Replies

Abstract

The first half of this work was dedicated to exploring and developing the narrative theory of identity. In the first chapter, I argued that narrative is not only a heuristic for us to understand the identity of persons, but a constituent of personhood. In the second chapter, I argued that the narrative theory of identity can be applied to the identity of non-conscious particulars and that particulars have their identity in a natural narrative. The latter half of my project shall be devoted to extending the narrative theory in two ways: first, I respond to a series of possible objections; second, I argue that the narrative theory of identity is apt to dissolve the endemic problems of identity literature. In this chapter, I take up the former of these tasks and in responding to criticism aim to augment my view and prepare the reader for the fourth and final installation.

0. Introduction

In the last chapter, I pushed the narrative theory of identity into the realm of non-conscious particulars. There, I argued that it is narrative structure that creates and preserves the identity of things, as it does for persons. In the case of persons, our narratives, our identities, are constructed bearing in mind an initial set of *de re* facts. And, it is what we say about these facts in our autobiographical narratives that matters for personhood. This means that the narratives of persons respect both *de re* and *de dicto* facts and that persons are *abstract entities.*[30] In the case of things, we are not concerned with their moral status, and neither are we concerned with what humans have to say about their identities.[31] In other words, the key difference between persons and things is that the identity of things is wholly *de re*. This means that it is the world that 'writes' the stories of things, and that psychologies have nothing to do with this procedure. More accurately, the relations between an object and its environment revealed in, and instantiated by, its narrative create the identity of that object, and draw the limits of its identity over time.

In this chapter I defend my view against eleven objections. Although, in the last chapter, I dealt with what I see as the most pressing objections, I shall need to revisit some of the issues they raise in order to answer stronger corollary objections. So, I shall at some point discuss the psychological role of narrative in the identity of particular things, as well as worries regarding the claim that my view entails that there are no

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[30] It is important to remember that the *de re* facts of our person constrain the sorts of stories that we can tell, but that persons cannot be reduced to these *de re* facts, at least not without missing some of the important narrative character of persons.

[31] This is not the case for technological objects. What we say about technological artifacts matters to their constitution. See Chapter 2 for more on this.

particulars, just the world. Before I attend to any of these objections I shall first summarize my position and draw attention to the various weaknesses of my approach.

1. Summary

Central to my view is the contention that narrative constitutes the identity of particulars: the set of unique relations that a thing possesses is what develops the foundation for its identity, what gives it its character as a particular, but it is narrative that constitutes identity. These relations are not between the object and its environment, not exactly. Rather, to avoid the charge of circularity, I've maintained that the relations are between the environment and the locus/ loci of the particular. In this sense, the environment, the particular members in the environment, shapes the space that the particular inhabits, and in this shaping, shapes the particular as well. But instead of arguing for some bundle of these relations, I have maintained that it is narrative that weaves together the disparate strands, themes, of relations that constitute an object. And it is through this narrative that we find the identity of the particular, and *how* it is preserved over time.

The main troubles I see for my project stem, I think, from three intuitions about narrative, relations, and about how one is to do metaphysics: First, that narrative structure is too fuzzy a concept to be helpful for a metaphysical theory, second, that relations are likewise fuzzy, third, that metaphysics must proceed from a logical analysis, not a literary one. In what follows I shall try to counter these intuitions by responding to specific objections against my approach and conclusions. In my replies, my aim is to clarify my position, situate myself within a philosophical lineage, and dissolve the worry that my project is off-task with respect to the analytic methodological standards of metaphysics.

However, I shall not demonstrate the true strength of my project until the next chapter, where I intend to show just how it forms the foundation for dissolving those endemic worries in identity theory and links together personal identity and the identity of particulars.

2. Objections and Replies

Objection #1:

Narrative is something told by a narrator, but according to the narrative theory of identity, particulars are not conscious and therefore could not tell anything.

Reply #1:

In the literature on narrative, there are two main views about what constitutes a narrative structure. The first has it that narrative is found only when there is some semblance of a narrator, or someone who is in the business of telling a story. The other, the structuralist take, is committed only to a certain narrative structure, and not the existence of a narrator as such. After all, who could the narrator of a fictional story be but a 'fictional' author? It couldn't be a 'real' author all of the time. This is because some of the reflections of the narrator are things that cannot be attributed to a 'real' author. Better then, I think, to take the structure of the story as an indicator of narrative, in place of a presumption about the existence of narrators.

Objection #2:

Narrative is superfluous to a historical account of identity: everything that is important about the identity of things can be captured in their history. A narrative account can tell us nothing more about the identity of an object than can a history of that same object.

Reply #2:

There are two advantages that the narrative theory of identity has over theories predicated on historical accounts of things: first, narrative gives us purchase on the continuity of objects, where history does not, second, narrative captures the sense in which identities emerge, dissolve, and admit of degrees.

At the end of the second chapter I maintained that there is a crucial difference between history and narrative. History, or a historical account of identity, I claimed, is an account from a fixed perspective (now), which looks at a thing from that perspective, whereas narrative is an account that comes from the perspective of the thing in question. The loci that matter for historical accounts, then, are not necessarily the same loci that are co-present with the objects of our interest. Historical accounts can only track the identity of objects in relation to a *now* perspective, they do not get at the salient relations of the environment as they matter to how particulars are (were) shaped as things. This means that they offer, at best, a contiguous account of identity: they mark past events and sum these as the identity of that thing. Narrative, on the other hand, presents a thing as it is in a changing environment.

This last point is closely related to the other advantage of narrative, that it captures the sense in which identity is an emergent property. Narrative is able to illustrate how the relations of an environment shape the identity of a particular. History,

is able to say only *that* a particular identity was shaped and maybe mark some of the important factors that led to the creation of that particular. This is important: history aims at a definitive answer to questions about existence at every point, whereas narrative resists this and allows for degrees of becoming.[32]

Objection #3:

If relations exhaust all that can be said about the nature of diachronic identity, then why not just take relation bundles as the constituents of identity? Why bother with narrative at all if is to involve all sorts of worries about narrators, and the consciousnesses of non-conscious things?

Reply #3:

In part, the reason I take narrative to be the constituent of identity in the case of particulars is to give us some purchase on what it is we refer to when we say "identity." That is, narrative is a concept that we are familiar enough with that we can understand what it is for something's identity to be a story (instead of a wave function, for instance) - we are comfortable with narrative. But, more importantly, narrative shows us *how* to bundle relations and how to choose the salient among them.

In his theory, Russell has it that particulars are composite bundles of universal properties.[33] How are these universals bundled? Well, through an unanalyzable relation called compresence, unanalyzable in the sense that it is primitive. But then what has Russell told us about identity beyond the fact that universal properties are somehow

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[32] Consider, for instance, the difference between a narrative history –a journal – and the same events told from the perspective of someone looking back – a chronicle.

[33] *Op. Cit.*

instantiated in particular things? Narrative theory says something more about the way that relations come together to form the identity of an object, to the extent that we can understand how the themes of a story unite to form the "character" (tenor) of that story: in narrative, we have an understanding of how disparate facts about things come together to develop identity. And we have an understanding, too, of what results.

Objection #4:

Following Leibniz, the Scholastics, and many others, relations are not real things; at best, they are associations that we have in our minds, or that exist in the mind of God, between things, or events. And, if all particulars are constituted by relations with all other particulars, there are no "real" things to ground the metaphysics.

Reply #4:

There are two responses to the central worry about the existence of relations that are available to the narrative theory of identity. The first response has already been given by the above reply, and it is to say that there must be more than mere relations to develop a comprehensive view of identity, there must be some principle to sort and sum relations into a single identity. Narrative does just this. The second response reveals my Hegelian roots.[34]

In the second chapter, I resisted the idea that there is only one thing, one particular, and not many. I said that narrative carves up the world into particular objects, and that if there were only one thing - the World, the One - then it would be somewhat absurd to suppose that this is a particular; that would be a category mistake. That is, if

[34] More on this below. I must emphasize, however, despite my affinity for Hegel, that I am not an idealist. Though, I admit that a phenomenology follows nicely from my account.

we take the entire system of relations as "what is", we end up with an object that is not tensed. Tensed objects need space to move through the world; relations must be extended and dissolved. And since I am interested in tensed particulars, the ordinary objects of our experience and their identity, I needn't worry about the totality of things, it being outside of time.

My motivation for accepting this kind of analysis lies in the following line of modal thinking.[35] Whatever world we are in must necessarily have a certain set of actual entities, otherwise we would be in another world. Given that we have the particulars that we do, we can be precise about the world that we are in. Alternatively, we can say that this world has a necessary constitution given the sorts of things that are in it. If it were otherwise this would be to say that the system of relations from which narrative selects in constituting particulars would be different, and thus the particulars would be different.

But we need to resist the idea that we are in a world of atoms, and that these atoms sum to form the world. No, the unity of the world is primary to its objects (and outside time). And the objects of the world are localized systems of relations that come together in a way that is essentially narrative.

Objection #5:

Despite the claim that narrative theories are constructed from temporal building blocks, there are no reasons to suppose that narrative identities can avoid the persistent problems associated with the absence of any real continuity (Hume's worry) and therefore cannot truly provide the basis for a diachronic account of identity. In other words, despite the

[35] This comes mostly from David Lewis' contention that we know what world we are in by which statements are true in that world. See for example Lewis, (1993).

fact that narrative theory may tell us about the important features of a thing's (or person's) identity, it says little about what it is to be the same thing over time.

Reply #5:

I have resisted giving a full-blown account of how narrative theory can account for identity over time mainly because this work is a gesture toward how we can begin to get clarity on what identity is, and not specifically a solution to all of the problems in the identity literature. However, I still must say something more about the procedure of how narrative can respond to worries about the illusory nature of continuity and identity through change. As Ricoeur and others have pointed out, narrative is intimately connected with time. But, more than this, narrative is intimately connected with continuity. That is, narratives require that a proposition link together with the propositions from which it follows, and to which it will lead. This is not to say that narrative requires a linear structure, only that propositions which are entirely disparate (disconnected) cannot be summed into a narrative. Following Ricoeur and Zwicky, narratives exist when "and then" can be added to join propositions into an intelligible story *in time*.[36] This means that the themes of narratives are contiguous, but does not mean that narratives are not continuous.

I've said that narrative identity is not a theory based on the mereological summing of discrete propositions, but now I must say exactly how narrative identities are continuous. It would be question-begging for me to argue that there is one continuous property contained in a narrative that preserves identity over time. Neither should I maintain that there is some other relational property that guarantees continuity of identity, for this property might belong to a number of things, and not be the sole property of any

[36] Ricoeur (1980); Zwicky (2006).

given particular. I maintain instead that we find continuity when we look at the themes (relations) that comprise the identity narratives of things. So, one theme might specify the changing relation of relative size to another object in the environment. This theme may not run through the entire narrative, but there are other themes that overlap with this, and others, to form a braid of identity.[37] It is the braiding of these thematic relations that embodies the continuity of identity; the relations between themes, the twisting together, if you will, that makes narrative identities continuous.

Objection #6:

Narrative identity makes no claims about the microstructure of things, and it should, because it seems to matter to the identity of things what they are composed of. In other words, narratives can't tell us everything there is to tell about identity, unless they contain propositions regarding the microstructure of the world.

Reply #6:

Whatever we choose as our basic physical building blocks, it makes no difference to narrative theories of identity. But some might think that, given a set of basic physical laws, and given the building blocks of reality, we can say all there is to say about identity. I want to strongly resist this intuition because it seems to confuse physics with metaphysics, and I want to maintain that there are things we cannot know about identity from the perspective of physics, or stronger, that identity is a metaphysical concept, not a physical one.

[37] The likeness to Wittgenstein's reflections on family resemblance is clear. This makes good intuitive sense, for what is identity but a special sort of sameness? See Wittgenstein (1968), especially p. 67.

Suppose, for instance, that the basic building blocks of physical reality are wooden boards and the rules for physical reality go something like this: boards can be moved, but only two can be in motion at any one time, and when a board is at rest, it must be touching at least one other board. On Theseus' ship then, we can rebuild the ship board by board such that all of the boards remain part of a ship, but in a different configuration than when the boat was first commissioned.[38] If we argue that the ship is the same ship, we do so on the basis that the relations of the boards are the same: that the boards come together to form the same shaped object. Alternatively, we might maintain that the relation of Theseus to the ocean has not changed, and neither has his continuous sailing journey been broken. Therefore, whatever ship he stands on now must be the same one he left Crete on. That is, the ship's narrative (as a technological object) is constructed with regard to Theseus's journey - in this narrative, it is one thing regardless of the relationship of its boards to one another. If we contend that the ship is different, we do so on the basis that the individual boards stand in a different relation to one another, irrespective of the fact that they form the same shape. But what is important to notice is that the ship's identity-constituting narrative is developed on the basis that the ship plays a certain role in a system of relations. When it is the same ship, the role is preserved and developed; if the fact that the boards are rearranged matters, it can matter only because the role of the ship has changed as a result of the rearrangement. (For instance, if the ship is no longer as beautiful, and so failed sufficiently to impress Theseus's beloved.)

We do not talk about identity in terms of building blocks and sameness because this does not seem to tell us any more about identity than it does the physical constitution

[38] This is Hobbes' variation on the problem. See Hobbes in Molesworth ed. (1939), part II, chap. 11, §7.

of an object at one time. And, most times, the natural extension of the physical view is to say that no macro objects exist over time because their physical constitution changes constantly. The only principle that the physical identity theorist can appeal to must have to do with percentages. In metaphysics, we want a principle that sorts things into categories and percentages cannot accomplish this task in a satisfying fashion.

Objection #7:

What of universals then? How do we reconcile our intuitions regarding universals with a view which seems only to have particulars, and particular narratives?

Reply #7:

During the run of my reflections about natural kinds, I gave some indication as to what I think of universals. And, while I shall reserve more substantial commentary on my project in relation to the history of identity literature for the fourth chapter, I shall say a little more about universals and their relation to particulars at this juncture.

Suppose we think from the perspective of the World (which is in truth many perspectives), and try to reason towards universals, and then particulars. I've said that it is narrative that chisels the identity of particular things from this large system of relations. However, I am at a loss to say exactly how we reason from an unwieldy set of perceptions down to just one line of perception and one object. This is why I've chosen not to look to the participation of universals in the creation of particulars. Rather, the methodology I've taken comes from an Aristotelian approach to understanding universals, (in a manner of speaking, from the ground up). It is important, though, not to

confuse this methodology with the metaphysics of narrative identity; and, following Hegelian intuitions, one should not think that narratives are summed to make the world.

Hegel takes to heart Spinoza's contention that all determination is essentially negative: *Omnis determinatio est negatio* (Hegel 135). Identifying particulars as particulars, I follow this line of thought and maintain that the relations of a thing to its environment are the foundations of a particular's identity. But whereas for Hegel and Spinoza identification is primarily negative, my positive concept of narrative (narrative as a constituent, not just a heuristic) turns determination, or selection, into identity. So, instead of merely a collection of predicates that "distance" the particular in its environment, we have a positive program in place to give character to the particular and constitute its identity. Narrative works to whittle down the identity of a particular out of an *always already-present* system of relations.[39]

However, I should say a bit more about the quality of universals in light of these reflections about the nature of the world. Suppose we take two lemons and set them side-by-side and ask, "What makes these the same?" I respond by pointing to the narratives of the lemons and saying that their narratives resemble one another. That is, they share themes, which points to an overlap of some of their properties and those properties grant them membership in the natural kind of lemons. If there are universals, or universal properties, then their narratives are master versions of the narratives of particulars that identify one and only one object; they are more general than the narratives of particulars. Shall I take the further step and say that the form of any universal is a narrative that gets instantiated in the objects that participate in that form? At present I want only to say that

[39] Notice that the same is true for persons, but that in the case of persons narrative is used psychologically, not naturally; persons cannot be natural kinds.

I would not resist this claim, except to the degree that it implies a kind of atomism about the world. Rather, if it is true that there are universal narratives that give us the quality of particulars, then it must also be true that there is a World-Lyric that gives us universal groups and so on down.[40] But, a defense of this claim may take me beyond the scope of my current project.

Objection #8:

The narrative theory of identity takes to heart a 'linguistic' turn in philosophy, but in the wrong way. A large part of the motivation for moving to a linguistic analysis in philosophy was to get precise about our concepts and develop a coherent analytic view of the language of these concepts, irrespective of the particular discipline. But narrative is too broad a notion to complete this task: this is the job for a logical semantic analysis, in particular modal logic, but none of this is detailed in the narrative theory.

Reply #8:

It is partly true that the narrative theory of identity fails to make extensive use of modern logic. I have, in the run of my commentary, had opportunity to make use of some modal language in order to dissolve the critique that narrative identity is only an identity that *we* give to objects, that it is not natural. I did this by drawing a distinction between those constitutive facts, which are *de dicto*, what we say of an object, and those that are *de re*, what *is* without regard to our pronouncement. For persons, I claimed that they have both

[40] A similar notion was suggested to me, with regard to persons, at a conference on narrative identity and community at the University of Victoria in 2006. I put forward the thesis that the self is essentially a narrative to which the speaker responded that first the self must be a lyric (I) about which nothing is predicated, and then the narrative is written from this lyric perspective. I've resisted this idea, however, for persons, because our thrownness already determines the state our starting point such that the lyric (I) already takes the form P(I) where P is some relation.

de re and *de dicto* constituents, but that we cannot reduce the *de dicto* components without losing some important aspects of personhood. For technology, this is likewise the case: what we say of the artifacts of technology makes a difference for their metaphysical category. However, I claim that the *de dicto* does not apply to particular objects; their natural character is captured by *de re* necessary facts. We may translate these facts into English, but these translations are not the constituents of their identity; mine is not an idealist position.

But, if it is true that there are natural (necessary) facts presented by the narrative identity of a thing, it seems as if we can precise this with modal logic and that this would be the appropriate language of identity, not narrative. This is because logic is meant to explicate concepts without the muddiness of natural language. So, with either set theory, or modal logic, we ought to be able to pull apart narrative identity and recapture identity in the "logical sense."

I've resisted this strategy, in large part, because I've maintained that the set of relata from which the constituents of any given particular's identity are selected must be infinite, and that the precision of set theory would not help to give it definite character. In part too, the logician's concepts of identity have hitherto led to the very worries this thesis is meant to dissolve. But more than both of these, I think narrative is a more powerful concept than the rules of inference, combined with some axiomatized system of naming. Let me explain.

In our everyday reasoning we use narrative to develop a view of why persons do the things they do.[41] To be certain, we must use some basic rules of inference and

[41] See Chapter 1.

instrumental rationality, but these are *contained within* narrative. What is a proof but a narrative telling us why one assertion leads to another?[42]

Suppose I want to show that the following is deductively valid:

P
P→ P

I do so by employing a basic rule of inference, reiteration (R), that says that if I have as a premise any atomic sentence, I am warranted to restate that premise again.

So,

P
P
P R

And, once I've shown that P leads naturally to P, I can introduce the conditional on the basis that it represents this fact.

P→ P →I, 2-3

At each step, we introduce a line by using a rule of inference that shows, as self evident, the truth of our current assertion. Why accept any of the basic rules of inference? Well, we must on the grounds that their rejection will entail an absurd world. We say: "What would it be if P→ P entailed ⊥?" It isn't just that it is an absurd notion, but that the kinds of stories that employ the absurd in this way frustrate our demands for narrative explanations that make sense of the way that we think about the world. When we write -

[42] I'll use deductive proofs here for accessibility and simplicity's sake. The use of narrative in inductive cases, though, more accurately represents the kind of reasoning we do when we assign roles and responsibilities to others on the basis of some evidence of their actions.

P

P

P R

P→ P →I, 2-3

- we've written a story, albeit bland, in short hand. For the purposes of logical analysis, we don't write this in the longhand of narrative. But when we ask after the justification of various steps we ask after stories to justify rules, not just for the reiteration of our rules. Most times this means telling stories about what would follow without the rule, counterfactuals that move our logical intuitions in one way rather than another. So, when we explain the introduction of the conditional on the basis of an assumption we say:

> Suppose that we assume some fact or situation. What follows from that fact? Well, at least *that* fact must follow. If I assume the existence of unicorns I know that if my assumption is true that the existence of unicorns will follow. It would be absurd if the truth of my assumption made it false that unicorns exist. Therefore, we should be able to use a rule that allows us to form conditionals with an assumption for the antecedent and what follows as a consequent.[43]

The examples may change in narratives that serve to justify self-evident rules. So too may our goals and reasoning change. We might sometimes be interested in explaining things in terms of absurd worlds and sometimes only in what it seems we are justified in claiming to know given some set of circumstances. But, for every case, explaining a formal semantics seems always to involve, as basic, a narrative translation into a "natural" language so that we may see the truth of our rules (or proofs, etc) in the context of a story into which we can sink our teeth. And, importantly, I maintain that a narrative is more precise than the proof that is meant to be its "reduction."[44]

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[43] We see this more clearly still when we consider equivalence proofs, such as De Morgan's proof for ~ (P v Q) = ~P & ~Q. (As I understand it, this was actually proven first by William of Ockham.) We want to say that the one expression is in some sense the "same" expression as the other (same in the sense that it is logically equivalent).

[44] This "reduction" is, I think, a kind of bastardization. Hence, the scare quotes.

Not all proofs work in this way. For instance, there are ways of proving that are essentially geometric, and that don't require the kind of thinking that is native to narrative, but native to gestalt. But the linguistic turn in philosophy has not capitalized on this method of proof so much as it has the narrative method of proof.[45]

Objection #9:

Although it may be true that narrative can capture, accurately, all of what can be said in propositional and modal logic, a difficulty remains. The narrative theory has made the semantic realist's mistake of taking a word for an object. That is, narratives cannot be constitutive of any thing's identity; they can only be constitutive of what we say of a thing's identity. And worse than this, even if there were "*de re* narratives" that ground and preserve the identity of things over time, this would still be a semantic claim (a claim *about* semantics), not a claim about the world.

Reply #9:

In part, this objection is a more sophisticated version of Objection 6, which claimed that the narrative theory of identity does not attend to the fact that a thing's identity should have something to do with the microstructure of things. I cannot, however, respond here by pointing to the inadequacy of this physicalist line of thinking for doing metaphysics. Rather, I must maintain that the semantic notions of a particular's identity, which we precise in a narrative metaphysics, just are the things that preserve identity.[46] In other words, I want to maintain that identity is not a thing, but a concept about a thing. And, though it is true that identity is sustained by the structure of bits of the world (the way

[45] See Zwicky (2003).

[46]This is quite similar to the ways that stories are persons' identities.

that the world is) we cannot kick identities as we kick the objects of our experience. Narrative does more than epitomize this structure, the structure *is* narrative. And, if this means that the bits of the world have semantic structure, so much the better for the semantic realists.[47]

Objection #10:

What structure gives us narrative? What exactly is narrative structure?

Reply #10:

Gerald Prince says that narrative is "the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other." (Prince 4). This definition begins to dissolve worries about the actual existence of continuity - narrative draws together events. And, aside from the claim that narrative is a representation, this would suffice to tell us about the kind of thing that narrative is in a way that works for my aims here. Even the representation part of this definition is not so worrying, because I am concerned with the structure of ontological entities, not necessarily the physical constituents of the objects themselves. Nevertheless, it seems as if we need more on the connection between the two events. On connection, Noel Carroll has this to say:

> A narrative connection obtains when (1) the discourse represents at least two events and/or states of affairs (2) in a globally forward -looking manner (3) concerning the career of at least one unified subject (4) where the temporal relations between the events and/or states of affairs are perspicuously ordered, and (5) where the earlier events in the sequence are at least causally conditions for the causations of later events and/or states of affairs (or are contributions thereto) (Carroll 42).

[47]Put another way, natural narratives mean what they denote: they "mean" the identity of a thing.

At any rate, narrative must minimally track at least one change of state.[48] This means, obviously, that the identity of the object is something that is essentially a temporal concept. But now we can see more clearly how it is that, as I said earlier, 'the objects of the world are localized systems of relations that come together in a way that is essentially narrative.' This is to say that there are particular localized states that are in the process of becoming and dissolving (this must be the case if particulars are relationally constituted). However, this language of states should not lead us to confuse particulars with events. The nature of events disallows us thinking about persistent events; only chains of events are available unless we think that things have temporal parts. An event must be a static state in the world, a state of affairs. The question: "Was the event iterated?" makes sense because we can think of states being repeated in the world. It's just that we cannot ask after the length of an event because any change in time will be a new event, strictly speaking. So, unlike events, which also may be relationally constituted if, for instance, we follow Leibniz, particulars are persistent objects.[49] It's just that their identities, their quality in the world and their temporal extension, is a system of relations selected by narrative structure.

Objection #11:

Supposing that narrative is an integral part of our psychology, why should we give any credence whatever to the contention that the metaphysics of identity can be grounded in notions that are essentially narrative? Any truth to this view could be attributed to a contingent truth of our psychology that makes the view intuitive to begin with. In other

[48] Schmidt (2003). See especially p. 19.

[49] If forced, I'd define events in terms of particulars.

words, there are no natural facts that are essentially narrative, just psychological facts that make us think it so.

Reply #11:

In part, what I am doing in this project (and what I shall have far more to say about in the fourth chapter) is developing a prescriptive metaphysics.[50] I say: "Look at things this way and difficulties dissolve." But this is not to say that I am not engaged in the program of saying things that are true of the way the world *really* is, though I am conscious not to call it a science as such. As Harre remarks, "The mistake of traditional metaphysics was not so much to say that metaphysics is about what exists, but in supposing that it was a science" (Harre 1).

It is, I admit, strange to develop a non-idealist metaphysics on the basis of a concept that has historically been associated with psychology. Nevertheless, if my structuralist tack on narrative identities is successful, the fact that categories of things are grounded in (what is often taken to be) a seemingly exclusive psychological concept should not trouble or confuse us. That is, if we can successfully extrapolate from this project an entire metaphysics developed on the basis of narrative structure, the categories of being that narrative selects will seem intuitive to all of us. It may turn out, too, that what we say of the objects of our experience, the kind of narratives we tell about them, are identical with the constituent natural narrative. That is, our stories about a thing's identity can be the right stories. This may be a necessary feature about our psychologies and the structure of the external world. But since that is not my interest here, I only note this as a possibility.

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[50] For more on prescriptive metaphysics, see the Introduction to Harre (1961).

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I've had opportunity to look closely at some of the weaknesses of the narrative theory of identity (as it applies to particulars). I do not intend this list to be exhaustive of all of the possible objections that may be raised against my view, but hope to have shed some light on the quality of those weaknesses the objections reveal. The final chapter is dedicated to looking at the strengths of my approach; specifically I shall look at the narrative theory's ability to dissolve the persistent worries in identity theory.

Chapter Four

Dissolving the Persistent Problems of Identity

Abstract

A main cause of philosophical disease - a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example (Wittgenstein, 1968: 593).

In the last chapter I dealt with a number of objections to my contention that narrative grounds identity, and that identity is had through a thing's narrative. It was my hope that the third chapter would serve to clarify my view with some precision. This was an essentially negative exercise meant to show the boundaries of the narrative theory of identity. The current chapter is the positive component, meant to illustrate the strength of this view. Although the temptation remains to try to show just how the narrative theory will *solve* the endemic problems of the identity literature, this is not my interest here. Rather, I shall argue that these persistent identity problems can be *dissolved* if we adopt the narrative theory of identity.

0. Introduction: Philosophical Dissolutions

The bulk of this project has been devoted to developing and precising a novel view on the identity of particulars: the notion that a thing's identity is its narrative. This is a constructive effort to develop a new theory of identity for particular things, the objects of our everyday experience, which is perhaps more in line with our everyday experiences of these objects. I opt for this constructive project in place of an extended commentary on the metaphysics of identity which would only reiterate the difficulties associated with identity in its attempts to provide complex solutions. In previous chapters, I've offered some commentary in passing on some of the intractable problems in the identity literature, but I've yet to meet them head on. In this chapter I mean to do just this: to meet the persistent problems about the paradoxical nature of identity. I do not, however, have specific answers to these problems as much as a way of dissolving their import. That is, I shall argue that certain modes of thinking, expressed in (read: caused by) certain ways of talking will lead to paradoxes of identity. If on the other hand we adopt a different "language," these problems should cease to trouble us. As Wittgenstein puts it: "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (*ibid*: 115). My task here is to present a new perspective and reveal a new image of identity.[51]

I want to focus here on three main problems in the literature that has to do with identity. The first two are well known: one has to do with the nature of identity over time, or the problem of identity through change, and the other has to do with the vague

[51] I should note that I am not arguing explicitly against *idem* formulations of identity; they have their place in the philosophical literature on identity. Moreover, I must emphasize that I am not arguing for an *ipse* account of identity for things. I am, however, charging the *idem* thinkers, the logicians and semanticists, with poisoning our thought apparati for understanding identity issues.

nature of some sorts of objects, the fuzzy nature of identity. More precisely for the first case, how is possible for an object to be the same object over time, despite the fact that it changes? When does it become a new object, and what does that mean for identity as a concept? And, in the second case, what does it mean for the identity of an object, such as a lake, to have boundaries that are in flux? Which parts get included in the thing, and which must be excluded? These issues have, I think, become intractable just because we insist that identity can be captured by 'x = x,' and then try to suggest a principle that meliorates the logical difficulties that arise from close consideration of diachronic identity and vague identities.

The last issue I'll deal with has not historically been cause for much concern, but nevertheless seems appropriate, and pressing, for this current investigation. This is the problem of disparate theories of identity, *viz.*, identity-for-persons, and identity-for-things. It seems as if we should be able to unify disparate accounts of identity, but many writers, even those that take bodies to be the sustaining essence of persons, have not successfully completed this project. Since the narrative theory of the identity of things has been adapted from the narrative theory of personhood, it is likely that we already have a unified account of identity between persons and things. But more than this, we have a unified account of identity for technological artifacts, the objects of art, and universals as well.

These three do not exhaust all of the problems with identity, especially if we consider identity strictly from the perspective of the Anglo-Analytic philosophers of language. However, my hope is that an investigation into these issues will help to illustrate how other problems of identity can be dissolved. And I do not, as I've said,

have solutions to these problems (the paradoxes of identity do not respond well to solving, I think). Instead, I recommend that, if we adopt the narrative account of identity, we begin to see why these problems should cease to trouble us; that the storied identities of things allow us to accept these problems, not as problems, but as part of the concept of identity and in line with our intuitions about how the concept of identity is revealed to us.

What I aim to do here is provide an ounce of prevention in order to avoid the crushing pounds of semantic (logical) theory that attempt to cure the endemic diseases of identity. I do not think that the pounds of print on identity ought to be discarded.[52] They do clean up semantic theory so that the easy problems are more easily solved. But, it seems that we may dissolve many of these problems if we simply let go of our overused contention that identity is captured in expressions such as "x = y" or "(x = y) ⊃ (x = y)" or "□((x = y) ⊃ (x = y))". It is because of this thinking, on my view, that we've been forced into talk of fuzzy logics, closest continuers, and divisions between kinds of identity (persons and things and statements and so on.)[53] Instead, I propose that we can avoid this work by thinking in terms of narrative, in terms of identity roles owing to particular perspectives, in terms of *identity-qua-this*. Narrative is thus not a solution to the inexorable problems but a reason why they *should* cease to trouble us.

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[52] Potentially, a more thorough examination of narrative identity could demonstrate that, in fact, we can discard much of our earlier thinking on identity in the philosophy of language. An argument to this effect would first have to establish that narrative could, following a reply in the third chapter, exhaust formal logic and thereby deflate the value of formal semantics. 'Informal semantics,' narrative, would then be used to establish a theory of meaning (and truth) in terms of narrative structure, context, and interpretation. This project is beyond this scope of my work here.

[53] For more on closest continuers and temporal parts and four-dimensionalism see Sider (2002), van Inwagen (1988) and Lewis (1986).

1. Philosophical Dissolutions: The Problem of Fuzzy Identities, Vague Objects

In this first section I want to focus on so-called "fuzzy objects," those things without clear cut boundaries or sets of properties. Our knowledge of the microstructure of things, *viz.*, that two things touching "exchange" molecules, should lead us to reconsider our demand for precision and just accept that things are fuzzy. So, as it strikes me, from a physical point of view, or, indeed, intuitively, fuzzy objects should present no challenge or paradox to our thinking about the identities of things. But, from a metaphysical point of view, we require that some principle clearly delineate our fuzzy objects and parse them on metaphysical grounds (that is, in spite of our physical theory). This, I shall argue, is to demand too much. We can't find some non-arbitrary principle to do the delineating for us. Instead, we need to think of fuzzy objects (in fact, all objects) as localized actors, and their identities as always becoming, always in flux. And, should we adopt this approach, we can build sense into our semantics (as we contextualize our actors) and preserve our intuitions about degrees of truth in statements about fuzzy objects without adopting a supervalutive line.

The central issue here is that we have no straightforward way of deciding which seemingly contiguous bits are really parts of a single, unified, whole. We cannot, for instance, say which drops of water by the shore are part of the lake, and which are part of the shore. The instantiation of our ordinary, mathematical, notions of identity - those including set membership and extensionality - do not give us any purchase on the ordinary objects of our experience. That is, when we ask after which droplets of water are to be considered part of the lake, there seems no non-arbitrary way of deciding. In ordinary language, however, we have solutions to such problems. We say: "The lake

ends where it meets the shore" or, "He is bald when we call him bald."[54] What does it mean to say that the lake has a boundary, or that a balding man is bald? It means exactly what *we* mean when we use our language. But these are not examples of satisfying dissolutions of metaphysical problems of identity, only problems about the language of identity. We cannot respond to questions that ask after more, those that ask, *In virtue of what are parts to be included in a whole? Does the lake have boundaries because we say it does?* No, the boundary of the lake, we think, is the sort of thing that is *de re.* In other words, there is some fact, beyond our pronouncing it so, that makes it the case that the lake ends at some place, and not another.[55] Do we, then, have a better solution in narrative theory just because it puts everything in terms of the stories we tell about it? No, narrative structure was meant to supplement our *de re* intuitions about things, and, although it maps to language (it tells us what kinds of words would go where), narrative structure is apart from language itself.[56]

Recognizing that some objects are fuzzy has caused considerable difficulty for those writers working on semantic theories of identity and has prompted logicians to develop fuzzy logics to recapture identity statements that refer to fuzzy objects. In fact, a plethora of supervalution theory has emerged to deal with these problems with a kind of

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[54] The latter of these is certainly an example of a sorites problem, perhaps the first is as well. I prefer to talk about these problems as problems of identity, and not so much problems of drawing boundaries or applying the "right" language to the objects of our reference. It may be that what I have to say about the identities of fuzzy objects will apply equally well to any sorites problem, but only as *de dicto* "solutions." And, as a complete investigation into the nuances of reference is beyond the scope of my interests here, I leave it open as to how my project applies to this larger philosophical field.

[55] We also want *de re* deciders for 'bald' too, but this might be too wrapped up in social conventions to eliminate all *de dicto* elements.

[56] See Chapter 3, especially Objection and Reply #10.

mixed success.[57] Many of these theories stipulate conditions that tell us what are the edges of fuzzy objects, but are unable to accept the central paradox that leads to these problems, *viz.*, that what we predicate of 'x' may, at the same time, be negated without a real contradiction.[58] This is not a failing on the part of logicians and semanticists, but a consequence of taking fuzzy identity to be a problem in the first place.[59] I contend that we needn't take the existence of fuzzy objects to be a defeater of ordinary semantic theory because we haven't realized that objects are *meant* to be fuzzy.[60]

Consider the kinds of questions one could pose about some character in literature. A *bildungsroman* is a good for this purpose; take Pip from Dickens's Great Expectations. At what point did Pip stop being a pauper and become a gentleman? If we hold on to our talk of identity [self-identity] as being always-already complete, as having a definite answer, then we are likely to give an exact instance - perhaps when he first moves to London. But this sort of answer is not satisfying, not, at least, until it is contextualized. That is, we need to say what the conditions of being a gentleman are for Pip, for this time in his life, for London, etc., and argue that Pip has met these conditions or at least some of them. And we realize this when we realize that the identities of persons are not fixed and will not respond to answers without qualification. This, however, is not just a characteristic of persons, (or of persons in narrative, fictional or otherwise) but of the

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[57]Supervalutive theory claims that, irrespective of some vague value, an argument is valid under every interpretation of the vague element that makes the conclusion true when the premises are true. See for instance, van Fraassen (1966), Dummett (1975), Keefe (2000).

[58] For more on this see Williamson in Loux and Zimmerman eds. (2003).

[59] Perhaps the failing belongs to logicians insofar as they think that identity is a dimensionless relation that a thing has to itself. Ricoeur certainly thinks that this line of thinking has crossed over into the talk about personal identity to the detriment of that discipline as well. See Ricoeur (1980).

[60] Fuzzy, or vague, admits of degrees as well. See Wittgenstein (1968), especially p. 77, for a discussion on this.

actual character of identity itself. When we think about objects in a vacuum, outside of any kinds of real pressures, immune to degradation, and so on, we have definite answers to questions about their properties. But these are objects outside of time, and outside of reality. When we think about particulars, we *should* expect their identities to be fuzzy. But, if we do this, we must give up wanting to make objects into determinate 'x's.'

So how exactly then does narrative complete the task of dissolving the problems associated with fuzzy identities? In just this way: Narrative theory says that we are wrong to ask after the kinds of strict identity statements that have hitherto led to these sorts of issues. We should not think that things are decidedly this, or that, only that there are some roles that are open to them within a system of relations, within an eco-system (quite literally). And this concept of 'role' does work to try to illustrate the emerging (dissolving) nature of identity. We are supposed to ask questions about the role the thing is playing within an environment. In that way, we contextualize the concept of identity that we are (should be) interested in. There is a fact of the matter about the boundary of the lake, but only insofar as it is a *this*, in so far as it plays a particular role within its environment. Identity is always "qua-identity" in narrative theory; it is always from a perspective *as this.*

That is, the boundaries of a lake change if we think of it as a cultural destination, or as part of the hydrological cycle, or as an object of representation, or as a habitat for birds. Each of these qua-identities has the lake set in a specific role that changes its boundary. The themes relevant to the narrative of the lake as a habitat for wildlife, as a watering hole for instance, will give the lake a different extension than will the narrative that has it as an actor in a hydrological cycle. It makes no difference to the hydrological

cycle narrative where the shore meets the lake, but for the lake-as-habitat narrative it matters where the water meets the land. In the latter narrative, the system of relations includes the birds that make their nests on the shore, the boundary is precised by the lake's relations to these birds, and this boundary changes on the basis of the change in these relations.

Some may object that there must be determinate points along the spectrum of becoming and dissolving. At these points, there are no questions about what is to be included as parts of the particular. Yes, there could be what we might call "ideal perspectives" from which objects have ideal roles, and very determinate parts. But, if we push toward this kind of thinking about identity, if we try to force it to be determinate, we miss the aspects of things *as they are* – their "qua-identity". The identity of things is fuzzy once we recognize that things exist in a *real* (actual) system of relations, and not within an ideal state of relations where everything plays a very specified role.[61]

In keeping with the Wittgensteinian theme, consider 'perspective' as it is applied to the duck-rabbit. Can we say that the duck-rabbit has its two identities at once? Can we see it as a duck-rabbit? No. But we can contextualize its identity in terms of the relations that are important to us. For example, we can maintain that the duck-rabbit is an illustration meant to generate a gestalt, or conversely, as a representation of a rabbit that sometimes resembles, but is not, a representation of a duck. Likewise, a thing's identity depends on the features of its environment and its relations to these. This, of course, means that identity is multiply realizable. If we cut two pictures (one of a lake, the other, of a mountain) into strips and mix them, but preserve the sequence of their parts, folding

[61] Even in Plato's heaven there are difficulties. See the *Parmenides* for example.

where they are attached, we make an object that is a dual representation of two disparate objects. We can say that it is a representation of a lake from one perspective, and a mountain from another.[62] Does this mean that the object itself changes? Not exactly. It just means that the lake-mountain's identity has at least one novel theme, one set of relations, that neither of the pictures (intact) possesses. If we look at the narrative of the mountain aspect only, certain relations cease to be relevant, those that require the inter-spliced lake for example. More stringent theories of identity cannot allow, I think, that the duck-rabbit is both a duck and a rabbit and that the mountain-lake is likewise a Janus. But narrative can allow for this paradox because it does not search for one, certain, timeless identity with fixed features but adds "and then" and leaves avenues of identity open.

2. Philosophical Dissolutions: The Problem of Identity Over Time

Following the above discussion, an attentive reader may have already guessed at my dissolution of the problem of identity over time (elsewhere called the "problem of change"). I shall maintain that the insistence of theorists in asking after static and complete identities will undoubtedly frustrate their attempt to develop a theory of how something remains the same thing through change. And, I argue that if we give up looking for completeness at some t_1 and admit that a thing's identity is always being developed, then the problem of change will cease to worry us. This means, of course, that we must accept a vague identity at t_1. Moreover, that we can only answer questions

[62] This is not meant to be a strict analogy to the duck-rabbit. The lake-mountain picture does not generate a gestalt.

about preserving identity through change after we accept that change, in relations, is an important part of identity.

Suppose that at t_1 Fluffy's fur is composed of an exact number of individual hairs, but also, that it's spring, and poor Fluffy is shedding. As she looses each hair, it seems as if we ought to say that we have a new cat. For, if in the first instance (t_1) Fluffy has some determinate property, then she can't be the same cat without that property, not in a strict sense.[63] This seems to be the problem of fuzzy identity, except it that we have a precise answer to the question "What are Fluffy's properties?" at least in the first instance (t_1). In an article entitled "Many, but almost one" David Lewis considers Geach's paradox of 1000 cats and suggests that only through contextualization can we answer the question: "Just how many cats are there on the mat?"[64] That is, we can refine our semantic theory through understanding what demands the question makes of us. But only after, it seems, we have accepted mereological summing of cats to be a satisfying strategy for determining identity and, importantly, that "almost identity" will serve well enough anyway. I do not see this as a suitable dissolution for this variation on the problem of change. Lewis, like Geach, is only avoiding the problem.[65] If we allow that arbitrary

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[63] Strict in the sense that if some predicate "P" is predicated of Fluffly (f) and P(f) is true at t_1 but not at t_2, we must be using a different object. This assumes that "P" is not time indexed.

[64] See Lewis (1993), Geach (1980).

[65] Perhaps Geach is on board with my approach, though accidentally. He says,

> Everything falls into place if we realize that the number of cats on the mat is the number of different cats on the mat; and c_{13}, c_{279}, and c are not three different cats, they are one and the same cat. Though none of these 1,001 lumps of feline tissue is the same lump of feline tissue as another, each is the same cat as any other: each of them, then, is a cat, but there is only one cat on the mat, and *our original story stands* (Geach 215, my emphasis).

It was the maintenance of the story of the cat, on my reading of Geach, that gives us the quality of that cat's identity and preserves that identity over time.

summing creates an object anyway, as Lewis does, then why would the problem interest us? We want a theory that does not make concessions in the first place to avoid the problems, but accepts the 'problems' as legitimate characteristics of identity. In other words, we want some theory that says that it's OK that things change; that the fact that things change does not entail that we have many things because change is part of being.

It is question-begging to attempt to get at the problem of identity through change by attempting to determine the properties of a thing at t_1 and then specifying which of these are important to its being the same thing through change. In the first place, we haven't ever a determinate subject of which to predicate anything, and secondly, it is arbitrary which properties we choose as essential until we see which persist. Suppose we spray-paint Fluffy green and then present her as a special specimen to our colleagues. Then we ask about Fluffy's essential properties. Surely we'll get conflicting answers regarding the accidental nature of Fluffy's unusual coat. But how do we get consensus on this? We wait. As Fluffy wanders around the office, looses her green coat and grows a new one, plays with computer cords, and sits at the window we begin to develop a more accurate view of what Fluffy is.[66] We can do this because we "see" the role she plays in the office, we see the relations selected by her narrative. That is, we see what things are true of how Fluffly interacts with her environment and the ways in which she changes that environment and is, in turn, changed by that environment. We build her identity, her character, by separating the properties (relations) that persist for a while from those that are wholly transitory.

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[66] "Who Fluffy is" is OK too.

The example can be extended to somewhat more permanent objects. For technology, the extension seems fair: we must learn (see) how something is used, how it lives with us, to see *what* it is, and what its properties are. In the case of art it seems necessary that we must wait, at least as long as it takes for us (as viewers) to see what role that art plays in our lives, how it influences our thinking, about art or about anything else. For natural objects too, it matters what role they play over time; it matters how their being in the system of relations they are makes a difference to the entire system. The stone is the same object now as before because its doing what it does now matters to what it was in the past. When the stone bears the weight of a set of large boulders and keeps them from rolling down an embankment, it develops the identity of a stop, it takes on that role. A role cannot happen outside of time, and neither can narrative, and neither can identity; it must be developed as relations between objects are created and sustained.[67]

Identity is always in a process of becoming. Does this mean that I am becoming I, that I am not I now? Yes and no. We should not, I think, begin by thinking about particulars, the actual objects of our experience, in terms of determinateness. Is P(f) true?

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[67] The main difference between natural objects and technological objects, when it comes to the metaphysics of narrative identity, is that technological objects have constituent identities that are not wholly *de re*. This means that humans, and some other species, fill in some of the constituent salient relational bundle with the things they "say" of technological artifacts.

I think it uncontroversial to maintain that technology is in a very strong sense *de dicto*. And, although it may be contentious to maintain that *de dicto* properties metaphysically constitute anything, it seems fair to say that technological artifacts are unlike natural artifacts insofar as they are *for-us*, (or *for-another*). In a sense, this makes the technological artifacts closer to persons in their metaphysical make-up than they are to natural objects, or objects *for-no one*. We only need to think about some of the hard cases involving artificial intelligence to see the intuitive pull of this last claim.

For technological artifacts, our psychological relations matter to their identity; we add to the narratives of technological artifacts, or better, we add to the narratives of natural objects to make them technological artifacts, the structure of what we say being identical with our technological imperatives, and principles in fields that relate to that object. So, narratives about weaponry are attached to a stone to make it into a piece of technology, an artifact aimed at the task of violence.

I'm ambivalent about the place of art on a spectrum between wholly natural and technological (or wholly fictional) objects. Our imperatives for art are not as clear as they are for technology, and neither does it seem that art has its own imperatives. At any rate, we can say that there are specific *de re* features of artistic objects, but that how these features are written into *our* narratives about art is an open question.

Is it necessary? Is it essential that P is predicated of (f)? These are examples of the wrong way to begin thinking about the identities of particulars because it asks too much of contingent things. What would it be for some thing to be the same thing over time? It can't be a generalizable relation, for, if it were, then it would be the relation of being-identical-with and not only would this answer not be informative, it would also be circular as a definition. Shall I say then that some earlier object and some later object share the same narrative, and that this is why these objects are the *same* object? Not exactly. A narrative does develop and maintain the identity of objects (and persons), but only in virtue of its themes and characters (objects, persons). We make a mistake in trying to identify some 'x' to begin with. Following the discussion above, we ought instead ask, "What object gets carved out of the world?" We then say that a particular is the same particular as some other because it continues the themes of a narrative that selects it as the subject, that selects it *as-this* from the totality of world-relations in the first place. For instance, think about the identity of the lake as a watering hole. Does it continue the theme of a hydrating source for elk after it has been poisoned with mercury? No, that theme (and other relative themes of ecological support), has ended, and the narrative ended, and the lake is no longer the same particular.

As I argued in the section on fuzzy objects, it is not arbitrary how the 'x' gets picked out in the first place. But, more than this, I maintain that identity is always diachronic identity; it matters *how* things exist in time. This is why I'm not here interested in the (strictly) semantic questions of identity: they pick objects for identity inquiries on the basis of (assumed successful) reference, not on the basis that their identities matter for any questions about identity over time. I find this procedure absurd.

Why should we think that if we arbitrarily name something that we will be able to rename it without knowing something about the thing itself, and/or the conditions under which it was named?[68] Why did we ever think that this would work for persons? Why should we persist in thinking it for things? I say instead that a particular (very much like a person) is the very same in virtue of its having the "same" perspective. Which is to say that it continues playing the same role in its environment, that it continues the themes its narrative selected when it was selected as *that* particular.

One may be reminded here of Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblance. Wittgenstein says that we have a better conception of a concept as we list off the members of its family:

> We extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (Wittgenstein 67.)

So too is the case for the identity of a particular. As a body extends through space, or is repeated in time if you like, the twists of the particular's identity, the thematic relations of its narrative give a more definitive character to that identity. There is no "identity property" that runs the entire length of the thread, no one relation that makes the lake a watering hole (one drink does not make it a watering hole). But rather, the themes are developed by many relations between, in this case, the lake and the animals in the ecosystem. Narrative wraps the themes of its subject/object together to form identity; identity cannot start at t_1 with a single fibre but only after a twist, and that requires a t_2.

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[68] For these reasons, I'm sympathetic to direct, or causal, theories of reference because of their attentiveness to the actual conditions of naming and subsequent reference. See Kripke (1980) and Donnellan (1977) for extensive commentary on baptism and causal chains of reference.

The identity of the lake as a watering hole is only undone as particular relations disappear and themes of sustenance are dissolved, and the narrative is ended.[69]

3. On the Unity of Personal Identity and the Identity of Things

In this section, I argue that we have a unified account of identity in narrative. I begin with a short investigation into what would naturally be thought to be the contender for this unified account between persons and things - the bodily criterion account of identity. I shall argue that, not only does this criterion fail to tell us about the relevant features of personhood (in the right way), but likewise fails to say anything at all about the identity of the ordinary objects of our experience. I then discuss the narrative account of identity and demonstrate the smooth gradient between how we think about the identity of persons and things in terms of narrative.

Theories of personhood, and personal identity, do not have the same standing in the history of philosophy as do the broader questions concerning identity, essence, thisness, and so on. In part, the cause for this is clear: questions of personhood were not at issue for the Ancients just because the requirements for personhood were only that one be male and, sometimes, a land owner. Now, of course, there exists a vast literature on personal identity and quite sophisticated requirements have been substituted for the criteria just listed. However, there is no unity between accounts of diachronic identity for objects, and those constructed for persons. This is somehow discouraging. It seems as if we should be able to provide a criterion for identity that can be applied irrespective of ontological category. We ought to be able to answer the question, "What is it for some

[69] "Is narrative a language-game then?" I suppose it must be in a broad sense, but with rules only having to do with connectedness and sequence and time.

thing (concept/person) to be the same thing (concept/person)?" with a single reply. In other words, the ontological status of a subject should not change what it is we suggest is the right criterion of identity. With a single, unified, account of identity, we would have a good starting place for developing a full-blown metaphysics, and perhaps, it is only after we've developed a unified account of identity that we can speak properly about the categories of our metaphysics.

How do we know that some person is the same person we met last month at the conference? We look at their body and, barring some substantial change in their appearance, find that it resembles the body of that person we spent time with between sessions at the conference. In virtue of what is that person the same person as the one we mused with in the corridor outside the lecture hall? In virtue of the fact that she has the same body. These are the basic contentions of the bodily criterion theorists. Many (most famously Bernard Williams) have argued that this is how we ought to understand personal identity, and that the body is the criterion for determining personhood.[70] This view has been widely criticized for missing the key psychological components of persons, and failing to tell us anything meaningful about persons qua experiencing subject. I will not rehearse any of these objections here.[71] After all, I think we should give some credence to the view that our identity is written into the features of our bodies and that our bodies help develop our identities (think: gender). Moreover, it most times requires argument to convince others that subjects without human bodies are, or can be, persons. But in spite of telling us very little about the psychological lives of persons (except by implication) the bodily criterion seems to give us a single way of

[70] See for example Williams (1974).

[71] See Schetchman (1996) and Parfit (1984) for example.

understanding identity for things and persons. A person is the same person over time if she has the same body, and a stone is the same stone over time if it has the same physical characteristics.

If we were to leave the bodily criterion view as it is presented above we might think it ludicrous for anyone to propose it as a theory of diachronic identity. This is because, obviously, all physical objects (macro ones anyway) change from moment to moment, and yet we want to say that bodies retain/maintain their identities despite this change. So the bodily criterion needs something else, whether it be a caveat about closest physical continuers, or something about temporal parts. Otherwise we can reject it out of hand.

But whatever principle is proposed to mitigate the bland view articulated above, it will not provide the kind of unity that makes identity about persons an analogous type with identity about things. This is because any view that says that a person's body is what makes that person the same person over time will maintain a strong supervienience relationship between personhood and human bodies. But, what kind of relationship is there between (natural) thingness, the identity of things, and physical bodies? We need here something more basic that can account for how some physical body is the same body over time. If one were to suggest that the form of the object is identical over time just in case there is some bodily continuity, or sameness, this might be the right kind of identity criterion, the right kind of supervenient relation, but would be about the formal identity of things, and not about the things themselves.[72] Moreover, the formal theory

[72] "Formal identity," as I use it here is merely meant to draw a distinction between talking about particulars as particulars (what I call "identity"), and particulars as collections of universal forms, as in Russell's bundle theory ("formal identity").

will likely invite the same difficulties on a different level because it too relies on extensionality.

Narrative theories of identity do not run into the same difficulties. This is because, on the narrative view, a thing is identical with a past 'version' of that thing just in case it plays the same role in the narrative over time. That is, it is the set of relations (themes) selected by narrative that maintains identity over time. The same is true for persons. The only difference between the two is that particulars have a narrative that can be wholly natural, whereas some part of the narrative of persons is psychologically constructed.[73] This means that persons are not natural kinds, in the strict sense, but neither are they wholly fictional; and that the objects of our experience are natural kinds, insofar as they are not transformed into technological artifacts (for-us). And, when we think about the identity of things and persons over time, it is the same systematic selection, for which narrative is responsible, that preserves identity in both cases. In the case of persons, however, we get to inject non-natural (normative) components into the narrative. This allows for a smooth continuum from things to persons that has humans and technological particulars between either ends of the spectrum.

4. Conclusion: On the Unity of Identity *Tout Court*

It may seem as if narrative is capable of being the sort of conceptual tool capable of helping us to develop a more extensive set of categories, to develop a consistent

[73] The spectrum, in fact, should continue in both directions - beyond particulars on the one hand and beyond persons on the other. At the left end of the spectrum we have things that are wholly *de re* necessary, universals for example. At the right end, we have pure fictions, wholly *de dicto*. What kind of things are these? Intensional objects might be one suggestion, propositions another, but I'm not entirely sure what kinds of objects are entirely non-natural (supernatural?).

metaphysics. After all, it appears to be capable of describing/prescribing the identities of many different kinds of objects. Can it, then, tell what are (or, should be) all of the categories within the [W]hole? I'm not certain that narrative is up to this challenge. In part, because I can't see how narrative itself can give us insight into how to apply our categories; beyond the game of writing narratives, there is nothing about narrative itself that can lead us to categories outside of time.[74] I think, however, that narrative can exhaust our metaphysics of identity for particulars, persons and universals alike.

In chapter three, I suggested that we can use narrative to tell us about universals, but only if we follow a bottom-up method of thinking about universals. That is, if we start, as Aristotle does, with the objects of our experience and then say that there must be universal properties (constitutive substances) of these things, we can begin to talk about universals as well as particulars. At the same time, paradoxically perhaps, we must realize that at base the world is a unified object that is carved into universals, and particular instantiations (loci) of these universals. If we can keep both perspectives in mind, narrative helps us get precise about the identities of both the objects of our experience and the world as a whole. On the one hand we see that there are general narratives of similar objects that we will call universals, not in the sense that they are, all of them, beyond space and time, but in the sense that they are generalizable properties. At the most general level, however, narrative must disappear: at the level of the world (or totality of worlds if that is preferred) only [L]yric can remain. This may be a failing of the narrative theory, or simply that its pronouncements about identity end when we begin talking about things completely outside time, at the level of, as Hegel puts it, the One.

[74] At least narrative cannot tell us too much about ontology, even if we can, in principle, force it to sort all of the categories of our ontology by thinking about master narratives and extending this procedure to include infinite, or timeless, narratives.

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