IDENTITY, ILLNESS, AND THE NORMATIVITY OF STORIES

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I argue that the telling and hearing of stories has everything to do with how identities are constructed, damaged, and possibly repaired. I suggest that this is especially the case when one's identity is threatened by serious, or deep, illness. My argument is motivated in part by the seemingly common sense suspicion that we are *selves* with enduring, unique identities. This persistent intuition has been both attacked and defended in a variety of debates within analytic philosophy. Yet these debates often seem to fail to address the quotidian-sounding worry about what I call the *identity of individuals* – the question of "who am I" (or "who was I," or "who will I be"). We might pose it casually while regarding ourselves in the mirror, when trying to find some ground upon which to make a difficult decision, or—crucially for my project—when coming to terms with a medical diagnosis that alters not only what one is capable of doing, but also what one is capable of conceiving. Indeed, what drives this dissertation is the claim that it is *especially* in facing our own physical and psychological fragility that accompanies deep illness that we are reminded that personal identities are not merely epistemic categories or metaphysical placeholders, but that they *tell stories* about us and *do things* to us, and are therefore of the utmost normative importance. Because our identities tell constitutive stories about us, I take it to be both theoretically and practically necessary to reassess the standard worries about them in order to find a place for the notion of the identity of individuals which, I suggest, gives voice to our concerns about who we are as unique persons. I argue that it is a *narrative* account of identity that grants us the theoretical flexibility and particularist discernment to

properly recast and address the question of the identity of individuals as a worry about our place in the world as *moral actors*. I say "recast" because this task involves a bridging of two complementary traditions of identity discourse that take themselves to be largely, and I believe mistakenly, at odds with each other: the generally theoretical analytical approach, and the broadly practical method of the narrativist and bioethical traditions. As an attempt to bridge the two traditions, the contributions that my dissertation makes to the literature on narrative, personal identity, and bioethics include (1) a narratively-grounded amendment and revision of the (largely) analytic definitions of personal identity, warranted by their failure to account for the individual identities of the deeply ill, and (2) a proposal of several constraints on the narrative accounts of identity in response to charges of relativism and theoretical vagueness. I take my arguments to establish a set of approaches that will enable bioethicists (as well as others) to address the numerous worries surrounding personal identity without at the same time being unnecessarily constrained by either the theoretical strictures of the standard accounts, or by the often philosophically opaque narrative practice.

For H.L., L.P., and J.G.

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"Philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand."
—Peter Winch, 1968

"Conceptual clarification is the most distinctively philosophical of enterprises."
—Joel Feinberg, 1984

INTRODUCTION

> *There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity...Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of self, after the manner it is here explained. For from what impression could this idea be derived? (Hume)*

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume famously argues that, in fact, there is no such thing as a self – nothing like a fixed identity that we can embrace, reject, or study. What there is instead is consciousness, which provides us with sensory experiences. If, however, we insist on clinging to the notion of a self, we are left with the less than satisfying option of identifying with a consciousness which is neither permanent nor reliably stable. We are, in the end, mere bundles of perception – and not enduring experiencers – somewhat clumsily moving through time.

This rather jarring (and for many, unsettling) view was, to a large extent, a salvo against Locke and others who have defended the psychological continuity criteria of

personhood, which allowed for a continuing existence of a self through one's identified consciousness and memories. Since then, much has been said about personal identity, most of it focusing on the persistence question – the worry about the necessary and sufficient conditions for the possibility of our survival as we move through time. Some defend a version of Locke's psychological states criterion, arguing that the continuity of memories and conscious awareness constitute personal identity[1], although famously Parfit has offered a rather controversial version of this view, claiming (unlike Hume) that there might be, if certain conditions are met, an enduring self, while insisting (unlike Locke) that there is in fact no such thing as an identity.[2] Others have adopted the body criterion, suggesting that it is the continuity of our uniquely human bodies is what matters, and what makes possible a continuing personal identity through time.[3] Too many have dismissed personal identity as a philosophically uninteresting – or nonviable – notion altogether, focusing instead on the metaphysical and epistemic confusion that the concept seems to engender. All this – and

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[1]Some notable supporters of the psychological approach include:
Johnston, M., "Human Beings," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 59-83.
Garrett, B., *Personal Identity and Self-Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1998).
Lewis, D., "Survival and Identity," *The Identities of Persons*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley: California, 1976), reprinted in *Philosophical Papers* vol. I, (Oxford University Press, 1983).
Nagel, T., *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
Noonan, H., *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989).
Nozick, R., *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
Parfit, D., *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
Perry, J., 1972, "Can the Self Divide?" *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972): 463-488.
Shoemaker, S., "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970): 269-285.
Shoemaker, S., and Swinburne, R., "Personal Identity: A Materialist's Account," *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).
Shoemaker, S. "Self and Substance," *Philosophical Perspectives* 11 (1997): 283-319
Shoemaker, S. "Self, Body, and Coincidence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 73 (1999): 287-306.
Unger, P., *Identity, Consciousness, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
Unger, P. "The Survival of the Sentient," *Philosophical Perspectives* 11, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

[2] *See* Parfit, Derek *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[3] *See* Thomson, J. J., "People and Their Bodies," *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
Also see Ayer, A. J.., *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936), *and* Schechtman, Marya, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

the implications for moral theory if we were to get identity "wrong" – marked it as a candidate for either the highly abstract (and practically removed) theories of those engaged in the philosophy of mind, or else for the overly case-specific (and theoretically ineffectual) "applied" philosophy.

In this dissertation, I argue that the philosophically dominant views of human identity simply do not get human identity – in fact, that they get it precisely wrong. I suggest that by missing the distinctions between the various meanings of the term identity, these views and their proponents treat it as a singular, unitary notion, depriving it not only of its moral depth, but also of its philosophical significance. Specifically, I claim that these approaches fail both theoretically and practically when we consider that identity might be a (personal, not merely philosophical) worry for all kinds of human beings, including those who might be made particularly vulnerable as a result of serious illness or injury. The way to resolve this apparent weakness of identity theory, I suggest, is to turn away from its more traditional conceptions, and toward a more narrative (perhaps particularist) account of identity.

Of course, no single philosophical treatment could possibly do justice to a question as broad and with as many implications for our lives (and not merely our theories) as one of identity and morality. With this in mind, the specific matter that I will address here has to do with what happens to individuals who are deeply, critically, and sometimes even terminally, ill – what happens to their identity during and after the illness (if there is an "after"), and what specifically moral role does this identity play? Yet, as might be suggested by my earlier comments, I do not believe that philosophers addressing issues of identity, broadly construed, currently possess either the proper theoretical tools, nor the experience of

encounters with patients and their stories that any reasonable view of identity of the seriously ill might demand. More precisely, the traditional theories of identity fail us here. My task, as I envision it, is therefore to take on what I consider to be rather mistaken views of (or attitudes toward) human identity, quite prevalent in philosophy and perhaps elsewhere: First, I wish to challenge the definition of identity as a matter of satisfying pre-determined conditions (I call this the "rigid identity conception"), and second, I wish to offer an argument for a thick notion of identity, which is not only contextually rich, but also morally efficacious in cases that involve serious, or deep, illness. Specifically, I argue that personal identity has a moral function – that it matters morally how we express, form, and interpret this identity. In short, the story (I am using the term story deliberately) of how selves are constituted must also necessarily be the story of how and why selves are valuing and valued – it must be a story of how selves are not passive placeholders, but morally compelling verbs. In this attempt to unite the descriptive and the normative aspects of identity, I will argue for a particularist conception of morality, and specifically, for a narrative approach to identity-construction of the deeply ill which might, in the end, offer us a way to analyze the formation of human identity as necessarily a moral question. How I propose to accomplish this is outlined below.

In Chapter I, I begin by motivating my project, and suggest several reasons why we ought to care both about the questions posed and the answers offered. In Chapter II, I engage with several standard theories of identity of persons and of personal identity, and suggest that they are less than satisfactory, given the consequences of applying them to actual people, and especially to those individuals who are seriously ill. Chapter III focuses specifically on Derek Parfit's particularly influential and troubling conception of identity and begins to examine the turn toward a narrative understanding of identity. In Chapter IV, I

first offer an overview of the debate among those who support and oppose the notion of narrative itself and provide a defense of narrative as a legitimate method of moral discourse, and second, I endorse a narrative approach to identity by answering one of its more powerful critics. Chapter V addresses the question of what it means to turn to narrative in addressing the normativity of identity, and specifically how and why such a turn is both appropriate and fruitful in cases of deep illness. Finally, in Chapter VI, I propose a tentative positive view of what kinds of identity-constituting stories ought to be told, heard, and accepted – and why.

What am I getting at? That there is a great variety of criteria for personal 'identity.'"
– Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations

CHAPTER I: SETTING THE STAGE

I. Disclaimers, Distinctions, and Motivations

Before proceeding any further, we might ask: Why another worry about personal identity, given the rather extensive body of literature that already exists, and the number of illuminating analyses that have been offered? And why suggest yet another method, narrative, as a solution to the perceived shortcomings of the more standard methodologies? My reason is twofold: First, I take the fairly recent turn toward the metaphysics of personal identity (notably, from Parfit and Dennett) to be overly reductionist to the point of either deflating, or removing entirely, the moral component of both identity formation and identity maintenance. Second, some prominent views of personal identity either do not necessarily coincide with moral identity (such as Frankfurt's view of reflective identification) or else coincide with it in limiting – and limited – ways (Frankfurt again, as well as some neo-Kantians, such as Korsgaard). And, as I noted earlier, since I will focus on the claim that personal identity is intimately tied to normativity,[4] neither of these types of claims seems to be explanatorily satisfactory (or indeed practically promising). But these are rather (theory)-specific worries, strictly speaking, which will be addressed later in the dissertation. In this section, I attempt to motivate the whole of my inquiry by appealing to a pretheoretical

[4] As a concept that seems to have much to offer to identity theory, as well as to the search for the grounding of normativity, both theoretically and practically.

intuition: that personal identity *ought* to be considered normatively efficacious, and that a narrative approach is better suited to address the normative aspect of the creation and maintenance of this identity. I suggest that these intuitions are not mine alone, although they are too often relegated to the back of the list of "philosophical" worries about identity.

However, given the variety of ways in which one could talk about identity – metaphysically, epistemically, ontologically, ethically – it seems we ought to take some account of how it will be addressed here. I begin with a brief disclaimer, where I first note some ways of inquiring into identity that I will *not* address here, and then I turn to the kinds of distinctions that I *will* be making between four rather different emphases in identity-talk, one of which I adopt, and three of which will become subjects of critique in the later chapters of this work.

a. Disclaimers

My interest lies not in the idea of identity *per se*, but in *personal identity*. Although, given my earlier comments, this might seem clear, I still take it to be useful to note the several kinds of current identity debates in which I will (generally) not be participating here, and which ought not be viewed as arguments either for or against my claims.

First, I will not be considering synchronical numerical identity, as my goal is not to determine whether two coexistent objects are parts of the same object of a particular kind, although I will address diachronic identity (that is identity over time) critically, with the intent of refocusing the worries that surround our continued existence as both physical and psychological beings. Second, rather than dealing with any sort of numerical identity, my claims will focus on qualitative identity: my discussion will center on how we are constituted

as persons – as individuals. In other words, I am interested in the question of who we are rather than in worries about what constitutes sameness among entities over time, exemplified by the longstanding wrangling over the Ship of Theseus paradox, where, according to Greek legend as told by Plutarch,

> The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned [from Crete] had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.[5]

That is, the query is this: if the entire ship were replaced, piece by piece, would it indeed remain the same ship, or would it be partially, or entirely, a different object? Applied to issues of identity, the Ship of Theseus paradox introduces similar questions of consistency over time – questions that, while important generally speaking, I nevertheless take to be secondary to my project here. Similarly, I will not address the question of whether entities might be said to have bodies that are different at different times. Finally, I also intend to sidestep the metaphysical worries about "absolute" versus "relative" identity, as well as the

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[5] *See* Plutarch, "Theseus ." *The Internet Classics Archive*. 2000. MIT. 3 Jul 2007 <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/theseus.html>.

Also see Deutsch, Harry. "Relative Identity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2006 Edition), Ed. Edward N. Zalta (URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2006/entries/identity-relative/>.

view that there are no philosophical problems about identity at all (that is, arguments that identity is an unproblematic notion, at least for philosophical claims and discourse).[6]

b. Distinctions

It seems that even if we filter out some of the aforementioned concerns about identity, we are still facing a serious possibility of conceptual confusion, for to rule out certain approaches to identity is not the same thing as to rule others in. With this in mind, I now turn from what I will not address to a tripartite distinction in the way we might think about personal identity. While at first such a move might appear as if I am begging the question – as if I am assuming precisely the kinds of claims that it is incumbent upon me to prove – I suggest that I am doing nothing of the sort. Instead, my aim here is to preview and clarify exactly what kinds of question about identity I am after, and to suggest how they differ from other (what I call more "standard") worries.

The "standard" worries about personal identity tend to be either psychological or somatic. The psychological view holds that some psychological relation is necessary, sufficient, or both for an individual to persist through time and inherit the memories, personality, beliefs, and so on from his predecessor. The somatic view, sometimes called "animalism" or "the bodily criterion of personal identity," tends to argue that our identity is

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[6] *See* Geach, Peter. "Ontological relativity and relative identity," *Logic and Ontology*, ed. M.K. Munitz (New York: New York University Press, 1973).

Also see Lewis, David. *Philosophical Papers.* Vol. 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

The claim about absolute identity is famously put forth by Peter Geach, who noted that the notion itself is a serious error, and that only relative identity can be considered as a possibility. The claim that identity is unimportant to philosophy is offered by David Lewis.

largely (or sometimes wholly) contingent on our bodily identity. These two views further break down into

a. the (metaphysical and epistemic) persistence question (that is, to what extent and under what conditions is a person at time t_1 is identical with an entity that exists at time t_2?). Specifically, in asking the persistence question, we wish to find out what might be the necessary and sufficient conditions for whatever being preceded me or whatever being will succeed me if I am to remain me. In other words, what is at stake is my numerical identity – the question of whether I am one entity rather than two, three, four, and so on,[7] and

b. the (metaphysical) "what is a person" question (that is, what sort of thing is a person that tends to exist from time t_1 to time t_2 and how does it differ from other sorts of entities?).[8]

[7] The numerical (or quantitative) claim is different from the qualitative claim. For example, if I manage to perfectly replicate a snowflake, there will be two snowflakes which are qualitatively identical, but quantitively different. The same applies to twins, human or otherwise – no matter how much they are alike, we cannot get away from the brute fact that there are two of them. However, someone who is my successor is not necessarily like me, as I am now, in all respects – she might be interested in different things, she might have a different hairstyle, she might be a different size, have different abilities (or disabilities), and so on. Thus, in asking the persistence question, we are wondering whether when we refer to an individual in front of us, and then to individuals who existed before and will exist after the one presently here, we are pointing to the same entity three times, or to three different entities once.

[8] *See* Derek Parfit "The Psychological View," *Self and Identity, Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, ed. Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin (New York: Macmillan, 1991) 229.

Interestingly, while question *(b)* has been the subject of some vigorous philosophical debates, it is worry *(a)* about persistence that has attracted the most commentary, and is indeed still the most widely endorsed means by which to address issues of identity.

The persistence question *(a)* has, traditionally, been approached from two different perspectives: The first, known as the "memory criterion" (often attributed to Locke, whose claims I discuss in the next chapter), suggests, for example, that a patient in a persistent vegetative state is no longer the same person as the pre-PVS individual because she no longer possesses the memories of that pre-PVS person. In short, the memories, this view claims, make the person. A potential worry about this view – and one whose complex metaphysical implications I will not discuss here – is that it places too much emphasis on the continuation of *persons*, while neglecting the continuation of *entities other than persons.* That is, it is quite reasonable to claim that a PVS patient perhaps ceases to be the person she was, but that something or someone nevertheless continues to exist, regardless of whether this new entity answers to the normative conditions of personhood. Indeed, to suggest that persistence is necessarily a worry about the persistence of persons is to neglect the question of persistence without such limiting conditions. It suggests a kind of an essentialism about persons, as if nothing about our existence as entities matters, other than our status as "persons."

After all, our aim might be to offer an examination of persistence through a variety of forms of life – not just the one with which we are most familiar. However, here, my intent is to examine the connection between identity and normativity, and while the metaphysical worries are certainly a part of the discussion, they are limited to their intersection with issues of morality and personhood. I will leave these very important and philosophically interesting worries about persistence in general for another time.

The second perspective on the persistence question, most notably attributed to Parfit, is the "psychological continuity criterion." It takes a wider view than the memory criterion of what is dispositive in our persistence as persons. Specifically, one persists if a person X at time t_1 is identical with Y at time t_2 if and only if X's mental features are related to Y's mental features through a series of psychological conceptions, such as personality type, desires, beliefs, memories, likes and dislikes, and so on.[9] I address this view in detail in the following two chapters.

Finally, as I noted earlier, the somatic view holds, among other things, that (a) our identity *is just* our animal body, and that (b) our identity through time is contingent on a consistent physical relation – that is, one persists through time if one maintains the same (or very similar) animal body (this is also called "the bodily criterion of personal identity.")[10] Generally, the somatic criterion does not imply that all animals are persons, or, indeed, that all person-like creatures (like PVS patients, embryos, or even, on some accounts, babies) are persons. Interestingly, it also holds that not all people are necessarily animals, and thus is "consistent with the existence of wholly inorganic people: angels or rational robots. It does not say that being an animal is part of what it is to be a person."[11]

These claims have some rather curious implications for both the persistence question and the "what is a person" question – implications that have placed the somatic view in a

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[9]Thomson, J. J, "People and Their Bodies." *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[10]A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936) 194.

Also see Olson , Eric T.. "Personal Identity." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2007. The Metaphysics Research Lab. 3 Jul 2007 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/#7>.

[11] *Also see* David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance* (Oxford: Blackwell , 1980) 171; *and* Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) Ch. 1.

position of disfavor among a number of identity theorists.[12] On the level of intuition, it seems rather strange to assert that if we were to transplant X's brain into Y's head and vice versa, X and Y would remain the same individuals *just because* their animal selves would continue to house the new brains. Quite the contrary, our intuitions might suggest that identities tend to follow the brain (or, the mind, as some would say), rather than be contingent on the legs, arms, or torso. The question of persistence, therefore, seems to be, at least intuitively, connected with our memories, beliefs, and desires. Moreover, the worry about "what is a person" seems to require more than a cataloguing of her bodily parts and animal instincts. Or so we like to think.

Yet, the somatic theorist might indeed have something to say about our intuitions, at least as far as what we often take to be the case when it comes to issues of identity. It would be very difficult and indeed strange, for instance, if I were to deny that, as I am sitting in my chair typing these words, it is only psychological criteria that matter in defining my identity. In other words, if we assume for a moment that my identity has some relation to my endeavors, it seems rather important that I am in possession of these hands that translate my thoughts into written words, and that I have eyes that allow me to scrutinize my actions. And I have legs that can move me from the chair to the world outside my home, thereby allowing me some much-needed rest that might, in the end, be beneficial to my work. In the end, when I have completed this writing, it will be appraised as something that has come from me, where "me" will be identified as the human animal who has gone through the acts of writing and submitting the finished product.

Perhaps this belief that our status as human animals has a very important relation to our identity is what moves those who continue to insist that a PVS patient is not really

[12] *See* Unger, P. 2000, The Survival of the Sentient, *Philosophical Perspectives* 11 (2000): 325-348.

"gone." That is, while the psychological continuity theorist might claim that what matters to the identity of a given individual has indeed disappeared, both the somatic criteria theorist, as well as the friends and relatives of the PVS patient, might be less inclined to do so, given that the body is still fairly intact and breathing, even if sometimes through mechanical means. The human form, it seems, is very difficult to dismiss as the unifying agent, the focus, and the symbol of human identity.

Outside of the psychological and the somatic worries about identity, we might wonder what is left. The answer to this question is the subject matter of the rest of this dissertation, for what is left, I believe, is the most common, and perhaps most *human*, question about who we are – the kind that we all ask, especially after a life-changing event such as a serious accident, illness, or what is sometimes rather flippantly called an "identity crisis." The kind that we ask in the middle of the night, or while staring into the mirror, when we think that nobody is looking. The kind that we do not have to be professional philosophers to ask. I suggest that "who am I?" unlike the psychological or the somatic questions about identity, is fundamentally an ethical one, connecting identity with the issue of normativity – indeed, perhaps even grounding and constraining our account of normativity, of what is good, or unwarranted, or expected, or right. While I will not offer a defense of identity as necessarily prior to ethics, I will suggest that how we shape and frame each other's identities is a fundamental element in our formation of ethical justifications and moral claims. The distinctions between various worries about identity that I introduced earlier in this section will, I suspect, be helpful in framing the discourse.

However, although I introduce these distinctions now, I will not immediately defend them, apart from suggesting that one – the worry about "who I am" – is preferable to others. By calling it "preferable," I am intimating that some ways of inquiring (and talking)

about identity are indeed better than certain alternatives. Specifically, I claim that there are elements of human identity that can only be sensibly analyzed using a certain mode of expression and embracing a particular set of concerns that allows us to ask the kinds of questions that potentially move us closer to something like a truth about who we are. Here, therefore, I merely offer a sketch of more fruitful inquiries about identity, namely those which have more to do with the identity of individual human beings rather than with those concerning the nature of personhood (although not necessarily excluding the latter).

The reasons for this boundary-drawing are not merely pragmatic: apart from serving as a map of my project, it also offers us a way to talk about identity that clarifies what we might be after by focusing specifically on the kinds of questions we ask. My suggestion, then, is that *how* one forms the question about human identity might be a reliable indicator of: (a) what one might find out about identity, and, more to the point, (b) what one takes to be important about identity. What I offer now is a map of the primary category distinctions in identity-talk which will serve as guides in untangling some of the theoretical and semantic confusion behind the concept of identity. While I make no claims that the discrepancies that I note here are the only ones, or are the only ones that *matter*, I do suggest that what follows is at least a helpful way to engage with questions of identity in a manner that does not succumb to many of the usual cases of miscategorization and common conceptual confusion.

1. A standard (synchronic) account of the *criteria for personhood,* which has to do with the question of what kinds of attributes make a person – *any* person – different from all other kinds of creatures. What matters here is how we are different from cats, tables, and trees.

What (normally) does not matter is how we, as human beings, differ from each other, or how we are perceived (and perceiving) as individuals. The question, taken at its most general, is about *the nature of personhood* – what it is, and how it is different from other ways of being in the world. As noted earlier, this worry about identity can (and has been) addressed by both psychological continuity criterion and somatic criterion theorists. Here, I use the term " *criteria for personhood"* in order to distinguish it from worries about *"personal identity"* (noted below), since the two are much too often conflated and (wrongly) taken to denote the same, or at least very similar, kinds of concerns about persons. In this sense, my reasons for using the language of *"personhood"* are mostly clarificatory ones, emphasizing the too often glossed-over distinction between "*personhood*" and *"personal identity."*

2. A standard (agential) account of *the criteria for moral agency* (both synchronic and diachronic) which has to do with the question of what makes an entity (perhaps even a human being) not merely a person metaphysically, but an agent – a moral being who has very particular sorts of characteristics that others that may resemble him physically (and even psychologically) do not possess. In this sort of account, most notably offered by Kant, and later, by Korsgaard and Frankfurt, among others, "personhood" and "agency" are sometimes conflated in a way that attributes the status of "person" only to those

beings who fulfill all (or most) of the requirements for agency. The goal here, it seems, is not to merely distinguish persons from non-persons such as chairs, rocks and cats, but also from those whose physical appearance, linguistic abilities, as well as many other characteristics are such that personhood (and thus agency) might mistakenly be attributed to them, even though, morally speaking, there is no warrant for doing so.

3. A standard (diachronic) account of *personal identity,* which has to do with the identity (or the reidentification) of particular individuals at any given time, through time, and so on. The focus here is mainly persistence through time, involving issues of memory, psychological states, and sometimes, physical attributes from time t_1 to t_2 to...t_n. How do we know, these accounts wonder, that we remain the same (numerical, psychological) persons with the passage of time in cases of very significant psychological and physical changes? What normally matters less in determining the status of our identities are first-person accounts of what it is to be a particular self, and third-person accounts of what it seems this particular self is like. Personal identity, therefore, is something of a shorthand way of saying "a bundle of physical and/or psychological characteristics moving through time." This account, therefore, is most often supported by those who take the psychological continuity criterion to be the most accurate – and complete – account of identity.

4. My nonstandard account, *identities of individuals*, which is the much more quotidian (that is, not born solely of philosophical speculation) question of who I am, how I see myself, how others see me, and what kinds of (social and moral) expectations this "seeing" sets up for me as a moral agent. The synchronic and diachronic accounts may play a role in this account of identity, but they are not outcome determinative, by which I mean that whatever their claims might be, individual identity requires a deeper, and less juridical, investigation into how we come to answer (and perhaps how we *ought* to answer) the question of who we are. If we do indeed desire an outcome from our analysis of identity – that is, if we want to move toward conclusions that are both theoretically and practically efficacious – then we might consider approaching identity as a *thick* concept. And what allows for this "thickness" to be explored most fully is the *identities of individuals* approach that I suggest here. In other words, how we come to define identity and how we perceive it in others and in ourselves is not merely descriptive but normative, carrying with it serious and deep consequences for how we act, and are acted upon, in the world.

All four accounts of identity and personhood are, at their core, inquiries into who we might be. That all four are after some element of what it means to be creatures such as

ourselves is not what is in question. What is at issue, rather, is which account of the ones just outlined provides us with the potentially richest answer. Of course, as I noted earlier, certain presuppositions govern each approach to identity: some presuppose a thick view of identity, while others do not, and while I suggest that identity is a thick, substantive concept, I also realize that this is something yet to be demonstrated. Suffice it to say that this preliminary stage-setting will be useful in later chapters, when I approach the questions of our identities in some detail. I conclude with some thoughts about why this investigation into identity strikes me as worthy of careful philosophical attention.

c. What This Is and Why It Matters

Thus far, I have offered certain disclaimers and introduced several distinctions with the intent of narrowing – and deepening – the discourse. What is left before turning to my central concerns are a few words about the philosophical importance of the question of identity, as well as some introductory (and explanatory) thoughts about the kinds of claims that I intend to make.

A number of theorists are beginning to give voice to the intuition that how we perceive ourselves, and how we are perceived, matters for our role as moral actors.[13] I begin with the tentative claim that the worry about personal identity is vital to us as moral beings – as entities who are not merely social, but self-aware, and able to inquire into, and wonder about, who we are. In order to be able to do this with some success, I suggest we attempt to

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[13] *See,* e.g., Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul, eds., *Personal Identity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Also see Amelie O. Rorty, ed., *The Identities of Persons.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); John Perry, *Identity, Personal Identity, and the Self.* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002).

draw a connection between normativity and personal identity. Put another way, we ought to begin to view normativity through the lens of moral and social situatedness of individual selves making their way through the world. This approach is at least partly due to what we are asking when inquiring about who we are: We want to know, among other things, what is reasonable for us to do, how it is reasonable for us to view ourselves in the world, what are the reasonable expectations others have of us, and how to reconcile our view of ourselves with the outside world of people and their perceptions and expectations of us. In short, in asking who we are, we are inquiring into how we are *constituted* – we are seeking a warrant for telling particular stories about ourselves, for hearing (and accepting) particular stories about who we are from second and third-person perspectives, and for subsequently acting in a way that is normatively regulated by these first, second, and third-person stories. But are we to make of this intuition?

I suggest that we would be correct to grant it some serious consideration. As might be recalled, my argument in this dissertation attempts to do precisely that. As I noted in the Introduction, I allege that many philosophically dominant views of identity get *human identity* precisely wrong by conflating the distinctions between the various meanings of the term *identity* and treating it as a singular notion, thereby depriving it of its moral depth as well as of its philosophical significance. More specifically, I suggest that this failure to distinguish between the sorts of questions that could be asked about identity can lead to claims that are deaf to the import of how we come to define and understand our identities. This "deafness," I suggest, is particularly destructive and dangerous when we take into account the potentially damaged and fragile identities of those who are deeply ill. I claim that one fruitful way to address both the need to draw finer distinctions in our analysis of 'identity' as well as the importance of those distinctions (especially in cases of deep illness) lies in a

narrative account of identity. Moreover, I claim that there are particular ways of addressing the narrative process itself that avoids some of its more significant failings.

Yet one might still wonder: why ought we, both as philosophers and as human beings, care about the concept of identity being too narrowly and indistinctly interpreted, and what does narrative have to do with any of it? The answer to this question – and thus my motivation for taking on this project – is both simpler and more complex then it would at first appear. I suspect (and will follow this intuition throughout this dissertation), that the key to the answer is *normativity*. Specifically, the *normativity of identity* in the sense that what is normative for us (and for others) is partly determined by the stories that contain these norms, in turn influencing the moral status of the representations of those stories that are our identities.

So the simpler answer to why we ought to give some serious consideration to the relationship between how identity is framed philosophically and its function as a concept in the world seems to be that it is potentially a *deeply moral notion.* I say "moral" because the consequences of how we are represented in the world and to the world (as well as to ourselves) are nothing less than who we take ourselves to be, and who others take us to be. That is, my claim is that what we take to be morally acceptable (or unacceptable), to be desired (or to be avoided), valid (or invalid), and appropriate (or inappropriate) among creatures such as ourselves depends very much on the narrative, the story behind the norm, the norm within the story. Specifically, the normative expectations of the world for us, and our expectations of ourselves and the world, in a very direct sense, communicated by these stories. The norms, in other words, are *embedded* in the stories in the sense that responsibilities, commitments, and so on are assigned to us by us and by others based on the stories (from the first, second, and third-person perspective) that constitute our identities.

They are there when we are told that "girls do not say such things," that "boys do not cry," that "the doctor knows best." They are also there when we tell ourselves to be quiet (because it is not our place to speak), when we choose to accept authority simply because we do not view ourselves as authoritative in any way, when we defer because we take it to be our place to defer – or when we almost never defer, regardless of circumstances, or readily offer our view, or take ourselves to be deserving or respect, of love, of recognition, and so on. In the cases of deep illness, when we are most physically and psychologically dependent, these stories take on special import, for it is then that we are more vulnerable to certain representations of ourselves (say, as weak, ineffectual, sub-human, and so on), and less likely to be able to construct the sorts of counterstories to find (or recreate) the sorts of identities that would represent us as morally efficacious.[14] It seems to be right (or at least plausible), therefore, to suggest that identities might very well mark our places in the world (and everything that goes with this "place"). It is these identities, it seems to me, which serve as the ground of the moral and social normative expectations which we accept or, as I will argue later, possibly reject.

An outright denial of this view seems rather troubling. If one were to discount the notion of identity as a significant constitutive element of normativity, one might also run the risk of failing to address what appears to be an essential, fundamental question in moral psychology, normative ethics, and, perhaps most importantly, in everyday experience: why certain reasons and explanations (of thoughts, actions, and desires) count as authoritative and motivational, and others are not efficacious at all. We value ourselves and others, therefore, under certain self-conceptions (and third-party conceptions that have received uptake), and these conceptions become standard-setting and reason-giving. The deepest,

[14] *See* Hilde Lindemann *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

most difficult issue – and one which I will take up at the end of this paper – is what warrant there might be, what grounds are possible, for endorsing certain self-conceptions (and third-party stories about the self) in the first place.[15] This might go a long way toward explaining why some reasons count for us in an authoritative and motivationally efficacious way, while others fail (or ought to fail) to move us.

Yet, why ought any of these intuitions about the cluster of topics that have traditionally fallen under the "personal identity" rubric merit further investigation? I suspect that the answer lies, at least to some extent, somewhere in the kind of attention that has already been given to the rubric's constituent parts: identity and personhood. That is, there

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[15] What seems to be presupposed in this discussion is a view of moral motivation that is grounded, at least to some extent, in the internalism/externalism distinction. In moral philosophy, internalist claims center on the assertion that moral beliefs function as a motivating factor. That is, there is an internal connection between X's belief that "Y ought to be done" and X's motivation to do Y. An externalist, on the other hand, would argue that there is no necessary internal connection between moral beliefs and motives – in other words, there is no necessary reason that the belief "Y is wrong" translates into a desire not to do Y. In her paper, "Skepticism about Practical Reasoning" Korsgaard notes that:

> An internalist theory is a theory according to which the knowledge (or the truth or the acceptance) of a moral judgment implies the existence of a motive (not necessarily overriding) for acting on that judgment. If I judge that some action is right, it is implied that I have, and acknowledge, some motive or reason for performing that action. It is part of the sense of the judgment that a motive is present: if someone agrees that an action is right, but cannot see any motive or reason for doing it, we must suppose, according to these views, that she does not quite know what she means when she agrees that the action is right. On an externalist theory, by contrast, such a conjunction of moral comprehension and total unmotivatedness is perfectly possible: knowledge is one thing and motivation is another.
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> Christine M. Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reasoning," *Journal of Philosophy* 83.1 (1986): 8-9.

I will not be offering any explicit arguments for either an internalist or an externalist conception of motivation, although I do suggest that internalism might very well be true. In fact, I suspect that my claims require some sort of internalism, for they are predicated on the thought that we are moved by our stories, and that our relationship with the world as moral beings is norm-creating for us because we come to accept (internally) the moral force of these stories.

For more on the internalism-externalism debate, *see* Putnam, Hilary, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975): 215-271; Burge,Tyler, "Individualism and Self-Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988): 649-665; Williams, Bernard, "Internal and External Reasons," *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 101-113l Williams, Bernard, "Internalism and the Obscurity of Blame," *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 35-45l; Williams, Bernard, "Postscript: Some Further Notes on Internal and External Reasons," *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, ed. Elijah Millgram (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 91-97; Hooker, Brad, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons," *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, ed, Elijah Millgram (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 98-101.

seems to be something compelling in trying to find out what is at the core of our puzzlement about ourselves as self-aware persons. However, my motivation is not based solely on the fact that these questions are intriguing – it is also the result of my belief that many of them are misguided and misapplied. Despite their many efforts to define and make sense of persons' identities, philosophers have, for the most part, paid scant attention to the crucial relationship between identity and moral agency. Nor, I would argue, have they offered a satisfactory account of personhood. Indeed, what makes the "personal" half of "personal identity" so intriguing is also that the current views are anything but satisfactory in either their methodology or scope.

Let us begin with a deceptively simple assertion: we – you, I, your brother, my friend, the woman walking home through the streets of New Delhi – are not only persons, but *particular persons* with particular identities. And we care about the fact that we are persons *and* particular persons – there seems to be something special, something unique about person-status, and about a certain instantiation of this human person-status in particular. But substantial disagreements have taken place about what it mean to be a person, how person-status is to be defined, whether what is unique about individuals really matters, and to whom it is to be attributed. To wit, some have argued that only human beings are worthy of the title of "person,"[16] while others claim that being human has very little, if anything, to do with being a person (in terms of the kind of respect persons are to be afforded).[17] Still others have held that even among human beings, the status of personhood presents a very crucial divide between and among entities, and is one that has to be "earned," either by the

[16] *See*, e.g., Norman Ford, *The Prenatal Person* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), Ch. 1.

[17] *See*, e.g., Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001).

acquisition of certain characteristics and abilities, or else by having the potential for those characteristics and abilities.[18]

Among the various approaches to personhood, too many seem to be over- or under-determined. P.F. Strawson tells us that a person is someone who has certain bodily and mental characteristics.[19] But this seems a bit too broad – some animals, whom we do not take to be persons, do appear to have both the physical and mental characteristics that Strawson uses to define personhood.[20] More recent accounts of personhood have centered on concerns about autonomy and self-determination, with the will signaling its presence, or at least the promise thereof.[21]

Finally, (as a preview to the next chapter), John Locke tells us that

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[18] *See,* e.g., Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[19] Peter Frederick Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959) 104.

[20] Although an objection might be made that I am glossing over several very large philosophical debates about how we are to define the human and the animal (and what presuppositions are at work in those definitions), my goal here is neither to address these worries, nor to take sides by offering a defense of a particular conception of the animal-human distinctions. Thus, I am not going to take up the issue of speciesism that Peter Singer, among others, takes to be central to the divide we tend to draw between animals and beings, such as ourselves. I am merely suggesting that Strawson might have been a bit over-inclusive in his characterization of personhood as a concept that sufficiently clarifies the distinctions that it is attempting to draw.

[21] Among the many works on autonomy, some of the more notable are:

Dworkin, Gerald, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). Dworkin introduces the notion of autonomy as a central idea on contemporary philosophy (especially in contemporary moral and political philosophy), and assesses the value of autonomy in a variety of practical moral issues.

See also Taylor, James Stacey, ed., *Personal Autonomy : New Essays on Personal Autonomy and its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Schneewind, Jerome B., *The Invention of Autonomy : A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). Schneewind addresses Kant's ethics, and analyzes them in a historical context.
Korsgaard, Christine M., *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Frankfurt, Harry G., *The Importance of What We Care About : Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

> This being premised to find wherein personal Identity consists, we must consider what Person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it.[22]

Boethius, too, noted that a

> person is an individual substance of rational nature. As individual it is material, since matter supplies the principle of individuation. The soul is not person, only the composite is. Man alone is among the material beings person, he alone having a rational nature. He is the highest of the material beings, endowed with particular dignity and rights[23]

Both claims seem similarly overbroad: Are we to understand and interpret such vague and complex concepts as "rationality" and "self-awareness" as simples, as terms that define and clarify, rather than further obscure?[24] I would suggest that, if we were to do so, we would indeed be deluding ourselves, for what might be meant by "rationality" or "self-

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[22] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Essay II xxvii 9.

[23] *See* Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans., P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[24] Of course, similar problems are present in Kant's moral principles, which take rationality (in the form of understanding, and acting upon, duties) to be not merely an essential feature of personhood, but the *sole* feature which gives us our value as moral beings. This worry will be addressed later, when I consider the various standard approaches to identity.

awareness" is perhaps just as unclear and as conceptually opaque as what we might mean by "person" or "personhood." Is rationality something that has a set number (and kind) of expressions – that is, is it right to say that I am acting rationally in ordering a meal in a restaurant when I am hungry, and, at the same time, my dog is acting rationally when he whines until I fill his bowl with food? Or are there distinctions to be drawn between these behaviors? The worry is that the story that needs to be told about the presence, function, and meaning of rationality in all of its guises seems to be much too complex, leaving us unsatisfied with the explanatory efficacy of the notion of rationality.

The same, or very similar, concerns exist about the self-awareness of personhood. What might we mean by "self- awareness?" It might be that I am self-aware because: (a) I am aware of my body as separate from all the other entities and objects in the world; (b) I am capable of distinguishing my thoughts, desires, memories, and so on from those of others (even if I am not entirely sure about what those others desire or think); or (c) I am capable of recognizing my place in a given social structure. But cats are able to pick themselves out from other cats (at least in the minimal sense of seeking out their own food, comfort, and so on). Moreover, I might be confused, on drugs, or have my consciousness otherwise impaired to the point that I cannot distinguish my memories as my own – and yet it would be very difficult indeed to argue that because of this, I cease being a person. Finally, some (nonhuman) primates are very socially aware, seemingly able to act on an idea of how and where they fit in among others of their kind. What might be meant by self-awareness (or what kind of self-awareness it is) is therefore not at all clear.

It appears, therefore, that neither component of "personal identity" – identity or personhood – is well understood or sufficiently defined. It might then follow that the inquiry into personal identity has been unsatisfactory at least in part as a result of this of

conceptual confusion. And yet, so much seems to be at stake in how we pursue the questions that have been thrown together under that rubric. Note that regardless of the different conceptions of "persons" and "personhood," in the preceding claims, it seems that most ascriptions of personhood have some moral weight, and are, at least to some extent, normative and not merely descriptive. Note too that I have used the morally loaded term "worthy" in describing certain attitudes about the attribution of personhood. This is quite deliberate, for what is implicit in the variety of views about personhood and identity and their descriptive efficacy is the question of the *moral* status of those who are said to be persons, and the lack of this status of those who do not.[25] What I mean is that the permissibility of our actions and attitudes toward others, as well as toward ourselves, may depend on the identities – on the perceptions of who we are. And given this possibility, our concern about identity ought not be something that is dismissed simply as a pseudo-concern, or else treated as an issue that is not deeply moral at its core.

This potential identity-normativity connection is even in evidence in the work of Locke, whose view I earlier noted as an example of some conceptual confusion regarding identity. Indeed, he has claimed that personhood is a concept that is deeper than any sort of diachronic account, and *is necessarily a moral one*:

> In this personal identity is founded the right and justice of reward and punishment.... [I]f the consciousness went along with the little finger when it was cut off, that would be the same self which was concerned for the whole body yesterday, as making part of itself, whose actions then it cannot but admit as its own now.... For as far as any intelligent Being can repeat the

[25] David DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 3-7.

> *Idea* of any past Action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present Action; so far it is the same *personal self.* For it is by the consciousness it has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is *self* to it *self* now, and so will be the same *self* as far as the same consciousness can extend to Actions past or to come.[26]

Locke's claim is that the essential features of personhood and identity are not our material selves – not our bodies, or some continuations of those bodies, but an awareness of *ourselves as selves* through time. In other words, what makes us selves – what creates our identities as persons – is our consciousness, which makes intelligible our existence in the world. The focus here is, interestingly, both on intelligibility to others and to the self: it is not sufficient, it seems, to know what the self is from a third-person point of view, which might only have a legalistic interest in another's self for the purposes of reward or punishment.

I note Locke's views now partly as a preview of a more extensive discussion of his claims about identity (which are to follow in the next chapter), and partly as a way to motivate the project as a whole. The project depends, I take it, at least partly on the sorts of intuitions I mentioned earlier about the role and value of identity in people's lives, and especially of identity of those individuals who are deeply ill. The simple fact of the matter seems to be that, while we impart identity-talk with great importance (for, after all, it has to do with who we take ourselves to be!), we are too often sloppy and less than clear about the

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[26]John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book 2: Chapters 10, 27. July 2 <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/10615>.

See Beauchamp, Tom L., "The Failure of Theories of Personhood," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 9.4 (1999): 309-324

subject matter. We assume too much, explain too little, and generally pigeonhole the concept of identity into pre-existing slots (Parfit – a matter of psychological continuity, Dennett - a necessary fantasy, a number of feminist theorists – an oppressive label, and so on) that suit our other views about the world and what matters.

And yet there still remains this nagging sense that the picture of what identity and its role are is neither complete nor accurate, and that more, much more, work remains to be done. Indeed, how do we respond to someone who has been given a terminal diagnosis when she asks us: "who am I now that I can no longer, work, care for my family, dress myself, or make plans for the future?" Do we respond in terms of agency, and tell her that although her own agency is impaired, she is still owed respect by other agents, and is thus now the recipient of their concern? What do we say to someone who, having been a runner his whole life, can no longer walk – or even move? Do we take an inventory of his remaining body parts, thoughts, memories, and so on and tell him that in general, he is still "himself," plus some "disabilities"? Not only would both replies be disingenuous, but they would be uninformative and non-responsive to the deeper question of "who am I now that I no longer recognize who I took myself to be" that the ill individual is asking. Indeed, when a world, including one's sense of identity, has collapsed, as it often does in cases of deep illness, we need better, more precise, and more case-sensitive tools before we make any attempts to put it back together for ourselves or for another.

It is this intuition that drives this project. That said, I know that I am not alone in addressing these worries about identity, and especially identity of the deeply ill. I suspect that generally (and despite our all-too-frequent discounting of them) we, as philosophers and as human beings, are moved – or ought to be moved – by questions about identity that simply refuse to go away. Namely, (1) why, quite often, the persons we take ourselves to be

do not cohere with the persons that others take us to be, (2) why we sometimes view our past "selves" as either more or less a part of who we might be now, (3) why changes in our circumstances – physical, psychological, and so on – can dramatically alter the view of ourselves that we and other hold, (4) why certain versions of who we are receive greater uptake from us and from others, depending on who a given narrative's author happens to be, and (5) why so much emotional, psychological, and social meaning seems to be connected with the question of "who we are." All of these worries about identity are *deeply normative* – and none of them are resolved by purely metaphysical, psychological, or other formulaic approaches to identity.

It is for these reasons (among others) that I take seriously Locke's proto-normative argument that one's identity might very well be the locus of "the right and justice of reward and punishment," and that memory can meaningfully connect one's present identity with its past and future versions, thereby making one morally accountable for the actions that one recalls performing. He allows us (at least initially) to draw the following three conclusions: First, we are the sorts of being who are not limited nor are fully defined by our physicality in the sense of not drawing the moral significance of our existence solely from the fact of our physical bodies. Second, we are the sorts of beings who undergo great change in our lifetimes, and it is these changes and their effects on who we might become that are important to our understanding of who we are as beings living in space and time. Third, we are the sorts of beings who are interested in understanding our identities not merely as being apart from other beings (say, apart from cats, tables, and apes), but in relation to other beings, such as ourselves (and, in Locke's case, in relation to God and His judgment). All three conclusions are indicative of a moral component to identity, for they address issues of responsibility, commitments, beliefs, and so on, and are thus responsive to the enumerated

concerns listed above. The definition and understanding of who we are is much more than a static physical description of our characteristics, and is more an understanding of a process of the relationship between identity and change – *of our specific, individual changes* – through time. This process, then, is necessarily a normative one, uniting identity formation and moral accountability, for once one is aware of oneself as a self that chooses and acts in the world of other selves (in time), of other actors and choosers, one's actions and choices become a part of a shared moral universe, with its norms, its oughts, and ought-nots.[27]

However, Locke's view (at least in its rather sketchy presentation here) also serves as an admonition of where we could go (and have gone) wrong in addressing the question of identity. As will become evident in the next chapter, his reliance on memory as the necessary glue that holds identities together as morally-evaluable time-slices significantly weakens his position. For now, however, there does seem to be something very right about his suggestion that identity and normativity are, if not intimately linked, then at least connected to a degree that is sufficient to warrant further investigation. In short, Locke helps us along with our intuitions about identity, normativity, and "our place" in the world. In this way, his claims go a long way in driving this project.

But why all this talk about normativity? After all, the focus of this dissertation is on identity, its meaning and definition, as well as its effect on our lives. Perhaps the answer is already quite clear: normativity, at least as I am using the term here, is a shorthand way of saying "warrant for actions, beliefs, and practices" – what, as Parfit points out, "we are rationally required to do."[28] But any question as to the meaning of normativity is also, at the same time, looking for an answer as to its source, and as Korsgaard has famously argued,

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[27] Mattern, Ruth, "Moral Science and the Concept of Persons in Locke." *The Philosophical Review* 89.1 (1980): 24-45.

[28] Parfit, Derek, "Normativity," unpublished manuscript.

normativity is just what I require of myself, after reflective endorsement – I, in other words, am the source of my own moral "ought," my decisions and actions warranted by the sort of (rational) creature that I am. Here, however, I am not strictly adhering to either Parfit's conception of normativity, nor to Korsgaard's more specifically Kantian version. Instead, I am more generally referring to "normative guidance," in the sense that it ought to be possible for us, as human beings, to be guided by norms. While I will not offer an exhaustive discussion of the recent debates[29] on the definition and sources of the norms that might guide us, I do suggest, with Peter Railton, that norms call on us and compel us to follow, and yet our freedom (and thus subsequent responsibility for our actions) is not at the same time threatened by our being thus compelled. When we follow a norm, therefore, we, adhere to some standard (of thought, of behavior, of treatment, and so on) that we take to be, in some way, acceptable, desirable, or at least necessary or unavoidable.[30] Of course, these rather diverse motivations for norm-following raise a number of problems, most of which I will not address here. For instance, we might wonder if "following a norm" just means manifesting a disposition that one has developed though acculturation, education, or some other process of "normalization" that produces in us a sense of what is to be valued (and what is not). Or perhaps it is a much more calculated, conscious process of deliberation – and perhaps requires an even higher-order process of reflection on our part.

My goal here, however, is not to take a position on how we come to hold the norms that we do *as norms*, as worthy of our adherence – this is a task for another day. The reason I take normativity-talk to be useful is that it frames our attitudes and practices regarding

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[29]Broome, John, "Normative Requirements," *Ratio* 12, (1999): 398–419; Korsgaard, Christine, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Railton, Peter, *Facts, Values, and Norms: Essays Toward a Morality of Consequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Wedgwood, Ralph, "The Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives* 16 (2002): 267–97.

[30]*See* Wedgwood, Ralph, "Railton on Normativity," *Philosophical Studies* 126.3 (2005): 463-479.

identity and identity-formation in a way that clarifies what happens when identities are created (or assigned), interpreted, or changed. Put quite simply, I suggest that we relate to each other through norms, which are a kind of medium of expression and intelligibility that allows us to make sense of ourselves and one another. And it is this complex medium that tends to determine the roles that each of us assumes: Within the value-laden, norm-driven environment of our existing social structures, I claim that our identities themselves become normative in that they indicate how we are to be treated, what we must do (and not do), as well as how we see our responsibilities to others and others' duties to ourselves. Given the overall project of this dissertation – especially its goal of addressing the identity of those whose identities have (potentially) undergone radical change due to serious illness – this connection between identity and normativity becomes vital.

Thus, somewhat stripped of its philosophical connection, normativity, too, has its place in what is at its core a critique of the philosophically dominant views of human identity. Although I will dedicate a later chapter to a detailed argument for the necessary relationship between normativity and identity, as a preliminary argument-motivating move, I take the connection between normativity and identity to be the following:

Even though

(1) there are norms that are represented by my identity that govern my actions, for they tell me who I am, what I ought to expect from myself and others, and so on,

and

(2) there are norms to which others hold me on the basis of my identity,

(3) there are better, more desirable norms that tell us which identity *should properly be attributed to me.* In other words, there are norms (and thus identities) for which there is more *warrant* than there is for (1) and (2).

Perhaps this kind of identity-normativity relationship has something in common with Charles Taylor's suggestion that coming to know who we are has something to do with coming to know what is important to us, thereby connecting identity and value, such that "my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose."[31] Thus, the question of the constitution of one's identity does not only answer the descriptive inquiries of "what" or "who" one is – it also is fundamental to addressing the normative question of why one's identity is constituted one way, and not another, especially when this identity has been rendered more vulnerable by illness. It is both this potential normative power of identity, and the failure of so much of synchronic and diachronic accounts of identity to take this power seriously, that motivate me.

Apart from these more theoretically motivated reasons to address identity and normativity, there seem to be other, more intuitive, quotidian, and perhaps less scholarly ones. That is, in asking what it might be *like* (and, correlatively, what it might *not* be like) to be ourselves, to be embodied in our specific identities often not of our own choosing, we

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[31] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 27.

Also see Kitchen, Gary, "Charles Taylor: The malaises of modernity and the moral sources of the self," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25.3 (1999): 29–55.

might wish to find out what part of us is "truly our own" – what part of us is authentic, and what shapes our self into what it is. We might want to know, quite simply, who it is that we find in the mirror in the morning, and what significance this identification has for how we are to conduct our lives. And again, the worry about who I am and how I came to view myself as such grows both in intensity and urgency when the "I" that stares back at me *today* is somehow damaged, either by serious illness or accident, and in some ways no longer resembles the "I" of *yesterday.*

In this dissertation, then, I am moved both by this *concern* about who we, as well as by the apparent fact that it has not been taken up in the right way by the philosophical community, and especially not by those engaged in what is loosely called analytic philosophy. It seems to me that not only what happens to us in our lives, but also how we interpret our life's story depends very much on who we and others believe ourselves to be. Far from an appeal for some sort of an idealist conception of identity, this claim's purpose is to convey why it matters that we pay very close attention to how identity is construed and constituted, especially in the case of the seriously ill individual: simply, if we, as theorists, do not take care and if we are not both rigorous and sensitive to how normative categories work and what they (can) do, the consequences might be devastating. One does not have to search far to recall the very telling example of the "gaslighted" Paula Alquist Anton[32] or recall the struggle of the desperately ill Vivian Bearing in *Wit* to be reminded of the costs that certain sorts of identities extract.

In the end, by forgoing what some theorists view as "mere laymen's concerns," we, as theorists, miss an opportunity to bring together a fundamental human worry about who we are and how we come to be that way and the rigor of philosophical methodology. In an

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[32] Benson, Paul, "Free Agency and Self-Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* 91.12 (1994): 650-668.

attempt to counteract this trend, this dissertation approaches identity in a way that will give voice to our more conventional, and shared, concerns, while at the same time employing the structure and discipline of philosophical inquiry. What I wish to address, in the end, are the lives of actual persons, both in health and in illness, in all of their ordinariness and all of their wonder. In the next section, I take on the standard approaches to identity, assessing both the questions of why they matter, as well as the reasons for which they ought to be challenged.

My self I then perused, and limb by limb
Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, and lively vigour led:
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
Knew not; to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,
My tongue obeyed and readily could name
What e'er I saw.
–Milton, Paradise Lost, VIII, 253-73

CHAPTER II: STANDARD ACCOUNTS OF IDENTITY

I. Why Standard Accounts Matter

Having outlined the four-part division between the kinds of questions about human identity that tend to be posed by philosophers and identity theorists, it seems that I ought to say a few words about why I choose to begin with an overview of what I call the more traditional accounts of identity, and how these accounts motivate my general project.

In the following section, I suggest that the traditional theorists restrict, and thus arguably weaken, their answers to what identity might be by limiting the kinds of questions they ask. Specifically, some wonder what it is like to be the same person through time, while others (mainly free-will theorists and moral psychologists) worry about what it means to be a person in the first place. While these are valid inquiries into particular metaphysical or epistemic issues related to identity, they are problematic as questions about identities of individuals – problematic partly due to the dispositive manner in which they are presented. Specifically, even though they are represented as worries about human identity, broadly speaking, they are not worries about identity of the kind that seems to matter to human

beings in general. Moreover, they are worries that even *philosophically* appear to miss the mark, in the sense of glossing over the actual social positions of large segments of the population.

Thus, what I am most concerned with is relevance and inclusiveness. Given their arguably serious flaws, the question still remains as to why address these more traditional views at all. The answer is, first, that they are *standard*, and thus influential in framing the debate. That is, the standard views are likely to be taken as definitive, or at least as overriding, in the ongoing deliberations about identity, and thus any appeal for an amendment must offer an explanation and evaluation of their constitutive claims in order to create a frame of reference within which an alternative may present a viable option. Moreover, there is, I suspect, a philosophical preference for parsimony, neutrality (among other things, with regard to how a given theory applies to different sorts of agents), and universality that is central to the dominance of these theories. It is this preference that ought to be questioned not only because of its consequences for *identity theory*, but also on the basis of the possibility of far-reaching *practical* consequences of such theory (implicating, therefore, my relevance and inclusiveness worries). Thus, I now turn to (some) of the foundations of the debate.

I begin Chapter II chronologically, by considering John Locke's empiricism about identity, and suggest that, in several important and problematic ways, his claims served to form the discourse about identity for several hundred years after they were first presented. I then consider Daniel Dennett's worry about personhood. Third, I address what is perhaps one of the more influential (yet, I suggest, nevertheless largely unsatisfying) views of identity – that of Derek Parfit. In Chapter III, I continue by considering several responses to Parfit: a concern about his negation of the role of the body in identity, a worry about identity and

agency of Harry Frankfurt and Christine Korsgaard, and finally, a critique by Marya Schechtman of Parfit's narrow definition of identity. Finally, I suggest at the conclusion of Chapter III that, although Schechtman's views offer certain improvements over Parfit's, what they take to be definitive of identity nevertheless leaves us with an emaciated notion of the *identities of individuals.*

a. Background: The Emergence of the Psychological continuity criterion: Locke, Memory, and the Conscious Self

Questions of personhood and of personal identity both have their roots in, among other places, John Locke's theory of the person. Indeed, his project – if his rather large body of work might be said to constitute a single project – can be viewed as a move away from the puzzling and often unfounded metaphysical assumptions about what kinds of things there are in the world, and toward a reliance on something that we could trust, namely, our senses. In several respects, Locke is a precursor to modern accounts of identity, but not because he is empirical in his methodology (for, in fact, not all modern theories were or are). Instead, it is in his focus on both what I call the "time-slice" approach to individual identity, as well as on the more general issue of human identity (versus the identity of other entities), that he foreshadows modern accounts. Moreover, he introduces the notion of identity as necessarily related to questions of morality and responsibility, thereby connecting metaphysical concerns about individuation and continuation through time with worries about normativity. Yet, like many of those who follow him, he fails to distinguish the notions of personal identity and personhood from the equally important question of the identity of individuals. In fact, the worry about the identity of individuals, at least as I frame it here, appears to be quite absent from his arguments about identity (but I will not speculate

here why this might be the case). I now turn to some specifics of Locke's account of identity as a means of introducing the modern debate and framing the issues that have come to dominate the discourse.

In assessing Locke's views, one must keep in mind his philosophical foundations, specifically, his empirical account of the origin of ideas (which I do not address here), as well as his subsequent skepticism regarding metaphysical knowledge, broadly construed.[33] As human beings, he claims, we are not possessed of any capacities which would allow us a clear idea of substance – either material (ideas of body) or immaterial (ideas of spirit).[34] This skepticism can, and often is, read as an outright denial of the (perhaps overly) optimistic Cartesian view that human beings have the ability to know the indivisibility of the soul – or, in fact, that we have any kind of a deep understanding of something like a soul at all. And yet it is here, amid Locke's seemingly intractable skepticism, that we find the foundations of the formulation of the problem of personal identity, for if we know nothing of the soul's nature, how do we also know that it persists through time?[35] And if any certainty that it does persist through time is gone, then Locke's project of offering a viable alternative to Cartesian rationalism (in which the problem of personal identity was never a serious concern in the

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[33] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, xxiii, ed. J. Carl Mickelsen, University of Idaho, 11 July 2007 http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/ToC/Locke%20Essay%20ToC.htm>.

See also Henry E. Allison, "Locke's Theory of Personal Identity: A Re-examination," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27.1 (1966): 41-58.

[34] Locke, *Essay*, I, xxiii.

> "But be that as it will, I think, we have as many and as clear ideas belonging to spirit as we have belonging to body, the substance of each being equally unknown to us; and the idea of thinking in spirit, as clear as of extension in body; and the communication of motion by thought, which we attribute to spirit, is as evident as that by impulse, which we ascribe to body."

[35] *See* Tipton, I.C., *Locke on Human Understanding: Selected Essays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977).

first place) seems to be in jeopardy.[36] Indeed, without some sense of what our "souls" might be, how can we view a person as remaining the same from day to day, from year to year, or, indeed, from sleep to wakefulness? If we cannot track any kind of a physical or non-physical continuation, we cannot seem to make sense of facing the same individual each time we see him. Locke's response to this dilemma is both important and curious – important because it succeeds in framing the debate about personal identity for several centuries, and curious because of what it leaves out or chooses to ignore. Let us now briefly consider his claims about personal identity, and then turn to some of their apparent weaknesses.

Recognizing that the importance of the concept of personal identity is both moral and religious,[37] Locke added a chapter entitled "Of Identity and Diversity" to the second edition of the *Essay*.[38] Without engaging in a detailed examination of his metaphysics and epistemology, we can note with some certainty that his claims about personal identity are most likely based on his more general views about sortal identity, broadly construed.[39]

See also Woolhouse, R.S., *The Empiricists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[36] Allison 41-58.

[37] Locke, *Essay*, I, I, 5.

Indeed, perhaps the most central and fundamental theme of the *Essay* is humility and moderation in our goals as knowledge-seekers: Locke tells us that we need to know what is necessary and useful for living our lives, thus delimiting the sorts of questions that we, as human beings, ought to ask if our goal is indeed knowledge, and not mere speculation. As he notes,

> "How short soever their Knowledge may come of an universal, or perfect Comprehension of whatsoever is, it yet secures their great Concernments, that they have Light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker, and the sight of their own Duties. Men may find Matter sufficient to busy their Heads, and employ their Hands with Variety, Delight, and Satisfaction; if they will not boldly quarrel with their own Constitution, and throw away the Blessings their Hands are fill'd with, because they are not big enough to grasp every thing."

In pursuing our happiness, therefore, our questions (and demands) of morality, religion, and science are to be practical in nature, and ought to aspire to no greater ends than to assist us in pursuing this happiness.

[38] Uzgalis, William, "John Locke," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 11July 2007 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2005/entries/locke/>.

Locke's account of identity goes to some length to separate the identities of atoms, masses of those atoms, and living things. Importantly, it includes the claim that just as each individual atom is unchanging over time (thus presenting no special problems regarding its identity), so the masses of atoms are distinguished by their constituent atoms, regardless of their organization of structure. It is a different story entirely, however, with living things, for unlike atoms and masses of atoms, their functional organization matters, and in fact differentiates one living thing from another. This organized mass of atoms persist through certain changes in its constituent particles (that is, though those changes that do not destroy its original capacity to function). And, as Locke notes, what matters in the case of living things is their continuous "life"[40] – the organization of its constituent parts in a manner that is most suitable to its functioning in the world, whether it is a tree, an animal or man (where "man" is an animal, which is physically individuated just like any other living thing).[41] Thus, the sortal identity of man is nothing but life as a particular kind of species – it is, in fact, *animal identity,* which persists through time, from our infancy onward.[42]

Here, we find Locke at a crossroads: having come full circle from skepticism about Cartesian certainty, we seem to be in an epistemic limbo, lacking in any sort of intuitive or certain knowledge about both our corporeal and incorporeal selves. Recall that earlier, I suggested that Locke dispenses with any possibility of either broadening or deepening this knowledge, given our limited capacities. But note also that I said "full circle," suggesting

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[39] *See* Allison 41-58.

Also see Uzgalis, "John Locke."

[40] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 3-5.

[41] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 6-8.

[42] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 6-8.

that while denying us access to this knowledge, even as a skeptic, he remains rather worried about the consequences of this ignorance, especially in the case of the persistence of souls – of our immaterial selves. The reasons for Locke's concerns appear to be born of his worries about morality, and specifically, about the difficulties of just punishment and reward, given the lack of certitude of our knowledge about both the natural and the supernatural realms.[43]

His solution to this apparent skeptical conundrum about our material and immaterial identities is to draw two distinctions: The first, between the physical "man" and the "person," *a corporeal rational being*,"[44] or a soul that is intelligent and can have knowledge of itself *continuing as itself* through time.[45] The second, between the soul (the thinking thing) and consciousness. Importantly, Locke is careful to draw the distinction between "man" and "person." Some of his reasons (which I will not address here) are the result of his faith, but some seem to be much more secular: In offering an account of personal identity that is not reliant on any sort of physical substratum, Locke deflates many metaphysical debates about human nature. That is, because the persistence of the same (material or immaterial) substance through time is not required for moral agents to exist, "persons" become less problematic entities, their reality only dependent on the proper relationship between

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[43] Locke, *Essay*, "Epistle To The Reader."

"What I had there written concerning Liberty and the Will, I thought deserved as accurate a view as I am capable of; those subjects having in all ages exercised the learned part of the world with questions and difficulties, that have not a little perplexed morality and divinity, those parts of knowledge that men are most concerned to be clear in."

[44] Locke, *Essay*, III, xi, 16.

[45] Locke, *Essay*, III, xi, 16.

Here, I will not address the specific of Locke's reasoning, for they are outside the scope and the focus of this dissertation.

memory, consciousness, and deliberation.[46] Let us turn then, to the distinction between soul and consciousness.

While the distinction between the physical "man" and the "person" sets up the difference between the corporeal and the incorporeal, it is the one between the soul and consciousness which is at the core of Locke's claims about personal identity. Specifically, Locke maintains that it is consciousness, and not the soul, that tracks identity, and can be transferred from soul to soul. That is, he takes a psychological rather than a somatic approach to what matters about identity: In "Of Identity and Diversity," he suggests that consciousness (of pleasure and pain, among other things) can be transferred from one thinking substance (soul) to another, and thus while a soul is changed based on what consciousness enters it, personal identity (constituted by the consciousness) is preserved through whatever changes affect the thinking substance.[47] Conversely, one might have the very same soul but be a different person if consciousness leaves the thinking substance (through an accident, through some event that the thinking substance may control, and so on).

It seems, therefore, that in order for us to make the claim that an individual has had the same identity over time, it is neither sufficient nor necessary to also claim that one remains the same soul, or thinking substance. Thus, while at any given time a certain soul, or thinking substance, exists, it is nevertheless not necessary that a body possess the same

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[46] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 24-25.

Locke's example of the prince and the cobbler is a telling example of his desire to remove the physical body from any considerations of personal identity: When a prince and a cobbler switch bodies, he tells us, the prince will take himself to be a prince even though he is in the cobbler's body, and vice versa. What matters is that each gets the appropriate judgment in the end, regardless of what body the particle consciousness happened to inhabit. The sameness of the body, therefore, has very little to do with personal identity.

See Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 15.

[47]Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 23, 26.

soul for personal identity to be preserved.[48] The body, in fact, is not central to the question of identity at all.

While at first this might appear to be an impenetrable jumble of poorly defined categories, I take Locke's claims to have some merit both philosophically and socially, if we take into account his goals. Concerned about the laws of men and God, Locke considered the fact that we are sometimes asleep, or unconscious, or in many other ways unaware of our bodies (and souls) to be a potential threat to the veracity of our praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. How do we know, Locke wondered, that our souls have not been switched with those of another while we are asleep? And, given his skepticism about what we can know with any certitude, simply investigating the issue would offer no respite from doubt – doubt which was, at least to Locke, unacceptable if what was at issue was desert. Thus, his distinction between our human souls and the consciousness that inhabits them serves to close those opaque gaps between periods of awareness. Since our "personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to itself past action,"[49] this consciousness is the source of our concern for our welfare, and our resultant accountability. Anything less would be an unjust punishment (or reward) of one who is ignorant of his actions:

> [T]o receive pleasure or pain, i.e., reward or punishment, on account of any such action is all one as to be made happy or miserable in its first being,

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[48] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 10-12.

Also see Uzgalis, "John Locke."

[49] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 26.

without any demerit at all. For supposing a man punished now for what....he could be made to have no consciousness at all, what difference is there between that punishment and being created miserable.[50]

Bridging these gaps, therefore, allows us to be *justly accountable* for our actions, thereby becoming moral actors – and for morality to be the purview of *persons*, rather than simply of *any living being*. And it is a soul with a "consciousness" – understood as the working of memory, connecting the various "me's" into a single accountable entity – rather than just "humanity" or "a man with a soul" that is the necessary, as well as the sufficient, condition for the possibility of a morally-grounded notion of personal identity: necessary because consciousness is the only connection between our past, present, and future through which we (as souls) can truly *own our actions*, and thus be held responsible for them,[51] and sufficient because consciousness has the potential to bring together my past, present, and future actions in a way that makes me *interested* in my future self, allows me to deliberate about the actions that I perform given this concern, lets me be motivated by this worry to act, and subsequently, makes it possible for me to be judged for those actions. In other words, the whole, reidentified (through memory), morally liable individual emerges out of a lifetime of changes.[52] Indeed, E. J. Lowe has argued that it was Locke who introduced the

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[50] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 26.

[51] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 18-20.

[52] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 15-18.

In fact, Locke claims that:

"For as far as any intelligent Being can repeat the Idea of any past Action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present Action; so far it is the same personal self. For it is by the consciousness it has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is self to it self now, and so will be the same self as far as the same consciousness can extend to Actions past or to come."

terms of the modern debate about personal identity, asking the "question to which previous philosophers had been oblivious."[53] Roger Scruton, moreover, attributes the current distinction between "being human" and "being a person" to Locke:

> Man, he argued, is not the same concept as person. The first describes a part of the natural world; the second is a 'forensic concept': it features in our inquiries into responsibilities and rights.[54]

The result, then, of all of these carefully (and not so carefully) drawn distinctions is this: the emergence of personal identity, *the self*,[55] as dependent on the psychological criterion of memory that is not merely categorically distinct, but morally robust.

Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 10.

[53] E. J. Lowe. *Locke* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005) 102.

[54] *See* Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy* (New York: Penguin, 1996) 304.

[55] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 26.

i. Locke's personal identity: some emerging problems[56]

However, this new psychologically based account of personal identity did not arrive without its share of concerns and puzzlements. In this section, I note several problematic conclusions to which Locke's claims about personal identity potentially lead. I will first say a few words about what I take to be Locke's profound and groundbreaking contributions to the discourse on personal identity, and then suggest some of the more worrisome directions in which they point. It is my hope that this scene-setting will provide the rest of this chapter (and indeed, the rest of this dissertation) with both structure and context. I take Locke's claims to fundamentally frame the debate about personal identity as both a debate about a

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[56] Here, I will only address the kinds of potential problems with Locke's views that are relevant to my worries about personal identity, and will not engage with other critics of Locke who noted certain surprising consequences of his arguments. Perhaps one of the better known of these critics is Thomas Reid, who argued that, by virtue of his views on consciousness and the role of memory in identity, Locke is committed to the absurdity that one might and might be, at the same time, the actor who performed a given act:

> "Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school, for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life: Suppose also, which must be admitted to be possible, that when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that when made a general he was conscious of his taking the standard, but had absolutely lost the consciousness of his flogging.
>
> These things being supposed, it follows, from Mr LOCKE'S doctrine, that he who was flogged at school is the same person who took the standard, and that he who took the standard is the same person who was made a general. Whence it follows, if there be any truth in logic, that the general is the same person with him who was flogged at school. But the general's consciousness does not reach so far back as his flogging, therefore, according to Mr LOCKE'S doctrine, he is not the person who was flogged. There- fore the general is, and at the same time is not the same person with him who was flogged at a school."
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> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969) 333-334.

Reid suggests that Locke's error is the result of having confused consciousness (that is, how we know the present) with memory (that is how we know the past). Locke, according to Reid, also conflates the constitution of personal identity with those things that allow us to recognize it as such – even if memory allows us to recognize something like personal identity, it is not, at the same time, become the cause of its existence.

Reid 107-116.

See also Locke Studies 27, ed. Roland Hall, 1996, Loyola University Chicago, 11 July 2007 <http://www.luc.edu/philosophy/LockeStudies/listings.htm#no271996>.

concept that deserves recognition as a unique and serious worry in philosophy, and a debate about a concept that is fundamentally moral, or, at the very least, that deserves attention as a potentially moral concern. However, I also suggest that Locke presents us with a very problematic and flawed definition of personal identity. I now turn to a brief summary of his clams about personal identity, and my criticisms of them.

As I noted earlier, Locke's view that consciousness is constitutive of personal identity *(a).* separates the personhood from the identity of other beings (including human beings, if those human beings do not happen to be persons), thus beginning the discourse on what I call *personhood, (b).* offers a (flawed) account of how identity remains intact, given the passage of time and the various physical changes that an embodied soul encounters, thus offering a view of *personal identity*, and *(c).* as a result of individuating and defining the personhood in terms of motivation and desert that placed it squarely into the moral realm, focused the discussion on the normative, rather than on just the metaphysical, aspects of identity. But even given this useful inauguration of the debate, we see the seeds of what I take to be serious theoretical and practical problems.

The first criticism is related to the question of accessibility and third-person judgments: If consciousness (or, awareness of what one wants to do or what one is doing) is constitutive of personal identity, then, it would seem, only the individual who possesses the particular consciousness has access to it and its motives. If this is the case, are we to conclude that no individual is able to assess morally (or, indeed, in any other way) the identity of any other? That is, if I am trying to decide whether Smith intentionally broke my window with a rock, am I to resign myself to the thought that Smith's motivational structure is permanently opaque to me? This, however, does not seem to present a problem for Locke for the following two reasons: First, while observers who are mere mortals may not

be sensitive to the workings of our consciousnesses, eternal justice is dispensed by a divine ruler who knows "the secrets of all Hearts" and who, unlike human courts of justice, makes no mistakes.[57] Second, Locke's account of personal identity is viewed (almost) exclusively through a first-person lens, whereby my motive and obligation are connected by virtue of my deliberations which tell me that I will, in fact, be punished later for my present bad actions.[58] In other words, if I take the threat of this punishment seriously, I will necessarily be less inclined to engage in the bad action.

But, of course, *there are problems* – serious problems for Locke's views that leave many who do not share his optimism about the rightness of eventual judgment, and who might insist that we nevertheless require some kind of access to first-person deliberations that would provide us with moral bases on which to both evaluate and judge the identities of individuals. Such third-person access might also be required for moral and epistemic reasons – as way to more reliably fill in the gaps between events that are opaque, and that, for this reason, make for morally opaque judgments. In other words, when the first-person access is blocked from the memory of her past selves (and thus from the possibility of deliberating about those past selves) for reasons of amnesia, mistaken memories, or illness, she might require the help of third parties to reconstruct her moral identity. Locke's assumptions about judgment-motivated deliberations aside, her remaining options are to forever remain disconnected from her past actions (and thus cease being a moral actor as far as those actions are concerned), or to be satisfied with concluding that she is now truly a "different person" from the one whose actions can no longer be recalled. But if we think seriously for a moment about the number of times that our memory is affected, it becomes

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[57] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 26.

[58] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 25-26.

more than a little unsettling to think that the only way we have of remaining persons with a stable identity that is subject to moral evaluation is through first-person memories or first-person deliberations. That is, even if one is sympathetic to the notion that first-person deliberations are fundamental to personal identity (which they very well might be), this still does not suggest that they are the only element of identity formation, or that third-person deliberations about the actions and possible motivations of another (other than the final judgment that Locke took to be imminent and dispositive) are not a part of the process. Moreover, even if we take the question of personal identity to be mainly a matter of the correct balance among (first-person) deliberation, action, and judgment, something appears to be puzzling, because for Locke, the story of personal identity seems to be only a worry about accountability, and this personal identity is third-person opaque. So, something looks to be missing. But what?

This brings me to the second criticism– perhaps a more general one, but one which I hope will shed some light on some of my suspicions about Locke's claims about personal identity. Put simply, it is a concern about Locke's apparent silence about certain quite powerful intuitions about *who I am.* This is a worry about Locke's apparent (and odd, given his empiricism) lack of concern with people, with how we actually are, or might be. This lack of concern is exhibited in at least two ways: First, while his definition of personal identity as a consciousness that possesses memories, deliberates, and is judged might serve as the groundwork for the discourse on human identity, its focus is on the *abstract person* (from which the later, but equally abstract, notions of *personhood* and *personal identity* eventually developed). Therefore, it seems to lack a concern for a *substantive view* of personal identity, or *identities of individuals,* which, I will argue later, offer us a way to talk about ourselves that is at once conceptually sound and normatively formative. Second (and perhaps this is just a

subset of the first part of the criticism), Locke discounts the importance of the body in his consideration of human identity.[59] I will now turn to consider both of these issues.

Pace Wittgenstein, and *cum grano salis*, when I take myself to be introspecting about my identity – when I look in the mirror and wonder who it is that stares back – I find good reasons to believe that there is, quite simply, *something there*, intertwined with my physical presence or body.[60] I consider myself to be the same person in the past as I am today, at least in the moral sense that my actions three, seven, twenty years ago, whether or not I recall them with the same clarity as I remember what I did ten minutes ago, are still mine, and not those of some entity to whom all deliberative and normative routes are closed. What is more, my identification with the "old me" is not merely that of a consciousness recalling itself being somewhere else at a different time – there are also memories of the body, physical memories that are intricately and inextricably connected with whatever memories I might have. I might remember, for instance, that it was I who badly skinned my knee when I was seven years old, and the reason that I know, aside from my memory of the event, is the light scar that is still visible there. In other words, my body constantly *reminds* me of its crucial, identity-forming participation in my life, and it also has its own ways of remembering.

However, even in cases where physical scarring or other physical manifestations of whatever took place are not present, I still experience myself as the experiencing subject as well as the volitional agent guiding my will, deliberating about choices, and ultimately responsible for them. And that this has gone on since I was aware of my own existence, and

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[59] Locke, *Essay*, II, xxvii, 9-10.

[60] Although much has been said on the topic of both the possibility and the efficacy of such introspection by Wittgenstein and a number of others, I will not here offer any arguments for or against our ability to engage in such introspection. I am presenting it solely as a way into my argument about the role of the body in claims about identity.

maybe even before that. In fact, I might say that I have evidence – *empirical evidence* – that my self is not something that appears and disappears with the wane and wax of memory. I know this, for instance, because people recognize me when I sometimes do not recognize them – they clearly remember *me* at a time that I do not; they have *witnessed* me, even if I have forgotten this witnessing. Some far-away tune, or smell, or taste will remind me of something, and yet I might not be able to say exactly what, while still being moved and perhaps even morally motivated by these sensations. My current position in life (education, employment, even marriage or lack thereof) might be results of actions that I performed or failed to perform in my distant past. I am therefore connected to myself as an actor in a way that a simple lack of clear, conscious memory cannot erase: two morally distinct actors are not suddenly created in place of a single absent-minded one.

Is this, then, the definitive kind of proof that a strict empiricist might require? Of course not. Yet my point is that the demand for such evidence, as well as the emphasis on moral accountability of abstract, disembodied identities, is simply not a very fruitful pursuit if what we seek is the connection between normativity and identity. I suspect that there is simply more to our individual identity – to the *identities of individuals* – than Locke allows. Our identities, it seems to me, are much more than the question of accountability, guilt, or innocence – indeed, as I have suggested earlier, they are so much more than the psychological process of the conscious flow of memories, or the subsequent process of moral deliberation.

Perhaps a bit of a cautionary disclaimer would be useful here. I am not, of course, making the case for the kind of notion of personal identity that Hume found so unconvincing: Hume noted that some philosophers have a curious tendency to refer to something called a "self," which is "simple," "identical" through time, and which remains

unchanged, unlike my thoughts and feelings which are a fleeting part of this "self." These philosophers, as Hume saw it, were making a *category mistake*, for in a world where knowledge was separated into matters of fact and relations of ideas,[61] there could be no such fixed mental substance that fit into neither category.[62] Since there is not a separate impression of the self which can be experienced by us (given that experience is essential to epistemological questions which are not matters of relations of ideas), there is no good reason to believe that there is something called a "self" that endures over time, since the most we can identify is a forever-changing consciousness. Therefore, there is also no such thing as *personal identity*.[63]

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[61] "All objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds , to wit, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of Fact. Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides, is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. That three times five is the half of thirty, expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would for ever retain their certainty and evidence.

Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if ever so conformable to reality. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, that it will rise. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood. Were it demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction, and could never be distinctly conceived by the mind."

L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902) 25-26, Sect. IV, Part I, Par. 20-21.

[62] "There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are the evidence of a demonstration, certain, beyond both of its perfect identity & simplicity...."Unluckily....[we do not have] any idea of self, after the manner it is here explain'd."

Instead, Hume offers what has come to be known "Bundle Theory of Mind," which takes every instance of awareness (and every object of that instance) to be an individual perception and "what we call a mind is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations..."

Selby-Bigge 251-263.

[63] "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

My point is that in putting into question Locke's view of personal identity, I am not at the same time subscribing to the kind of identity-essentialism that Hume critiqued. On the other hand, neither am I suggesting that Hume's alternative to Locke is somehow more satisfying. Indeed, when surveying my mind in a way that Hume supposes we can, I neither "find" *my self*, nor ought I reasonably expect to do so. What I "find" is a complex structure of beliefs, desires, memories, loves, hates, pains, and pleasures. I also find a body that is intricately involved with these beliefs, memories, loves, and hates – a body that is just as much their author as their recipient, as much a creator of memories as their repository. What I find, then, is my *identity as an individual* – my *sense* of who I am, which is distinct from both Locke's moral honorific of "personhood" and Hume's metaphysically solid and unchanging self.

Yet, as I noted earlier, Locke did open up the discourse on personal identity in a way that has not been done previously, specifically by bridging personal identity with issues of normativity and ethics. Given that it is not important what substance, either material or immaterial, happens to correspond with my identity, what does become important, and dispositive of my identity, are my actions (based on memories and deliberations). And it is this connection between actions and identity that results in the introduction of normativity: I am responsible – that is, I will be judged for – the actions which I explicitly remember performing as a particular entity with an identity. Identity, Locke tells us, is thus separate from metaphysics as well as from somatic necessity.[64]

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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."

Selby-Bigge 251-263.

[64] Interestingly, Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid presented some rather powerful objections to Locke's memory-based psychological conception of identity. Butler, for example, claimed that Locke was engaged in a bit of a "wonderful mistake," not realizing that consciousness "presupposes identity, and thus

Still, as I noted previously, Locke's focus on the psychological memory criterion of identity does neglect entirely the body's role in identity formation (and thus in normativity) and forces an all-too-stringent account of how memory affects identity. That is, I might recall something that I have done twenty years ago much more faintly than I remember what I did yesterday, but this does not mean that my memories that are unclear or less clear ought not be involved in deliberations and decisions that would be constitutive of my identity – and thus of the moral status of my actions. Locke, however, offers no such nuanced account of conscience and memory.

That said, Locke has been followed by a number of more modern philosophers who expanded on his ideas, both directly and indirectly. Some have rejected his psychological criterion of identity in favor of a definition that does not incorporate morality into the

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cannot constitute it." I remember that I went to the store yesterday because the memory is already mine to remember – my memory of it does not make it mine. Thus, "while memory can reveal my identity with some past experiencer, it does not make that experiencer me. What I am remembering, then, insists Butler, are the experiences of a substance, namely, the same substance that constitutes me now."

Shoemaker, David, "Personal Identity and Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 11July 2007 <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/identity-ethics/>.

See also Joseph Butler, "Of Personal Identity," *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 100.

Reid, agreeing with Butler, adds that among other worries, Locke's claims about identity imply a contradiction, where one "could both be and not be identical to some past stage," violating the transitivity of identity. The absurd result is that one could be identical to one stage in one's life (because one remembers it) but not another, even if the later stage occurred later than the former.

Shoemaker.

See also Thomas Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity," *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 114-115.

However, both Butler and Reid do agree that identity is indeed a moral issue. The disagreement, then, centers on *what* identity, in fact, *is*.

Shoemaker.

notion of our selves at all. Some have taken up the psychological criterion, albeit with very different results. And some have offered starkly different ways of connecting identity and morality. Importantly, however, in the discourse about identity and normativity, Locke's account of *personal identity* serves as a useful and challenging opening salvo, even though many of those who followed him offered arguments that, in the end, fail to address what I take to be most important about human identity. It is to these (more recent) theories that I now turn.

b. Dennett and our peculiar "selves"

I turn directly from Locke to Dennett for several reasons: First, Dennett happens to be one of the more influential theorists of the latter half of the twentieth century (and, indeed, today) of *personhood.* Dennett, perhaps more than anyone else noted in the dissertation, addresses the question of what distinguishes a person from a non-person. In this regard, his primary focus seems to echo that of Locke: what kinds of attributes make a person different – different due to the capacity for morality – from all other kinds of creatures? I argue that Dennett's very rigidly and seemingly arbitrarily constructed concept of the "moral agent" precludes any meaningful definition of *personhood,* and certainly does not address the question of *identities of individuals*, which I take to be the more (practically and philosophically) pressing worry about human identity.

Second, and more importantly, he presents a curious mix of Locke and, to some extent, Hume, as well as serving as a precursor to my later arguments for the necessity of a narrative approach to identity. Like Locke, he begins with the claim that there must be something important about criteria for personhood, since so much time and energy is

devoted to worries about what makes persons so (morally) different and distinct from non-persons. Unlike Locke, however, he dispenses with the psychological criterion of identity as a means to moral personhood, in the end taking the view that the project is at best misguided and at worst, a category mistake. In a sense, his claims are both something to push against and toward which to move. I divide Dennett's arguments into two parts: The first will address those of his claims that I take to obscure the identity debate, and the second will consider his views on the self as a "center of narrative gravity," which offer several crucial observations about the self and the process of identity formation.

i. Criteria for Personhood: Dennett and the Chimera of Moral Personhood

Daniel Dennett begins with the assertion that it is most likely the case that we are all persons.[65] However, unlike Locke, he suggests that "personhood" as a concept is rather confused. Although the terms "human" and "person" are potentially "coextensive"[66] in the sense that, while we, perhaps optimistically, take ourselves to be human persons, not all humans are necessarily persons, nor are all persons necessarily human. Re-introducing the metaphysical concerns about personhood that Locke so desperately sought to put to rest, Dennett suggests that the difficulties that seems to haunt us in trying to define personhood lies in the dichotomy between the *metaphysical* concept of a person, which is "roughly, the

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[65] We are persons to the extent that we are selves. And selves, as Dennett notes, can ostensibly be viewed as "what you control and care for."

See also Daniel Dennett, "The Origins of Selves," *Cogito* 3 (1989): 163-73, reprinted in Daniel Kolak and R. Martin, eds., *Self & Identity: Contemporary Philosophical Issues.* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

[66] Daniel Dennett, "Conditions of Personhood," *The Identities of Persons,* ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) 175.

notion of an intelligent, conscious, feeling agent," and the *moral* one, which is "roughly, the notion of an agent who is accountable, who has both rights and responsibilities."[67] While Locke asserts that one's conscious memories, and thus accountability for deliberations based on those memories, is what separates persons from mere "humans," Dennett makes no such claims, and only asks: is the metaphysical sense of an agent sufficient evidence of the moral one? That is, is metaphysical existence of human beings sufficient for their existence as moral persons? His suspicion, he tells us, is that even if the two notions seem to be distinct, they are not disconnected, for "there seems every reason to believe that metaphysical personhood is a necessary condition of moral personhood."[68]

In order to test this "specialness" of moral personhood, Dennett sets out six conditions with the intent to find out: (1) how these conditions are dependent on each other; (2) why they are necessary for moral personhood; and (3) whether they are jointly sufficient for moral personhood.[69] In considering Dennett's six-part criteria, we ought to keep in mind that they are necessarily hierarchical, where an entity must be an intentional system before it could even become eligible for moral personhood. For example, an entity cannot simply be self-conscious or capable of communication without intentionality.[70]

The six necessary conditions are as follows:

1. persons are rational

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[67] Dennett 176.

[68] Dennett 177.

[69] Dennett 177.

[70] Dennett 180.

2. persons are beings who are intentional (or, to whom intentional state are ascribed)

3. other beings take a personal stance toward persons (that is, the stance adopted toward an individual ascribes the status of "person" to that individual)[71]

4. persons are capable of taking a *reciprocal* personal stance (or having "higher order intentions") toward other beings

5. persons are able to communicate verbally

6. persons are capable of a "special" *self-consciousness* not found in other beings.

If the first three conditions are satisfied, what we have is an "intentional system," whose behavior might sometimes be predicted and explained by ascribing to it (presumably, in a reliable manner) beliefs, desires, and so on.[72] Yet, even though intentional systems presuppose rationality and are thus necessary for personhood, they do not get us to the sufficient condition for personhood.[73] This is so in part because intentional systems include too many entities to whom we would not readily apply the label of 'person' – the class is simply too large, and its members too diverse.[74]

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[71] " ... it is not the case that once we have established the objective fact that something is a person, we treat him or her or it in a certain way, but that our treating him or her or it in this certain way is somehow and to some extent constitutive of its being a person."

See Dennett 270.

[72] Dennett 179.

[73] Dennett 180.

[74] Dennett 180.

The final three requirements are crucial: although the fourth is possessed by most intelligent beings (and not just persons), the fundamental test of moral personhood rests on the fifth and sixth conditions. By the ability to communicate, Dennett means that a speaker intends to be understood by the listener. By self-consciousness, Dennett means that one is capable of reflective self-evaluation, "adopting toward *oneself* the stance not simply of communicator but of...reason-asker and persuader."[75] Theoretically, only if these last two conditions are met are we persons *in the moral sense.*

Yet Dennett remains unconvinced; he does not take the six necessary conditions to also be sufficient for moral personhood. The reason for this, he tells us, is twofold. First, insofar as the moral concept of a person is (putatively) a normative one (and Dennett takes it to be such), we cannot fix a set standard or draw a line in the sand beyond which beings become "persons." Second, returning for a moment to Locke's worries about accountability and judgment, we seem to be faced with the paradox of culpability: whenever we claim that a being is truly culpable (that he intentionally did something that he knew to be wrong), we cannot help but "doubt that it is a person we are dealing with at all."[76] If this were truly a person in the moral sense, with all of the six conditions satisfied, we have to wonder how he could have been capable of the immoral act. And nothing, Dennett concludes, could ever alleviate our doubts.

At the root of this apparent dismissal of moral personhood as a unique epistemic category worthy of serious philosophical attention lies Dennett's conflation of moral personhood and moral agency. That is, he combines the sorts of characteristics that we might take to be sufficient for moral personhood – for instance, one being the subject of a

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[75] Dennett 193.

[76] Dennett 194.

personal stance toward oneself by others – with the sorts of intentional stances and rational behaviors we might require of moral agents, or those sorts of beings who are not just the subjects, but also particular kinds of actors. He seems to ignore the possibility that, given certain physical facts, such as the presence of my friend's living, breathing, and perhaps minimally conscious human body, I, as her caretaker, can nevertheless hold her in personhood, even though she can no longer do so for herself. For example, take someone who is in the throes of late-stage Alzheimer's, and, as a result, has lost not merely her memories and the ability to take reciprocal (and rational) personal stances toward others, but arguably also the "special" self-consciousness of which only human beings (indeed, not even *all* human beings) are capable. It would seem that since Dennett does not grant moral personhood to even a perfectly healthy individual who meets all six of his criteria, he would clearly discount someone whose ability to merely recognize not only others but herself *as a person* has become unreliable.

But moral personhood is not so simple, nor is it so quickly undermined as a concept by one's apparent lack of agency. I will argue in later chapters that the implications of views of identity such as Dennett's lead us to the rather untenable (and indeed unwarranted) conclusions that (1) once one's rationality, the ability communicate, and so on are gone, one's moral personhood is also no longer present, and (2) this does not matter. But in his eagerness to dispel the chimera of "moral personhood" in favor of the metaphysical model, Dennett combines several (and at times seemingly arbitrary) requirements for what he takes to be moral personhood, thus failing to distinguish

(a). the possibility of a moral personhood outside of one's own moral agency, and thus

(b). the possibility of a moral personhood in addition to – not absorbed by – metaphysical personhood.

I suggest (and will do so in greater detail later in this dissertation) that evidence does not support either conclusion (1) or conclusion (2) as it is indeed possible to maintain the personhood of another – to " hold" someone "in personhood," according to Hilde Lindemann – when they are unable to do so for themselves. It is also quite reasonable to argue that this act and its consequences for both the actor and the subject of the actions *matter morally* in a way that a mere metaphysical account of personhood fails to capture.[77] Indeed, in the end, it will become quite apparent that the impaired individual's agency is not required in order for her to be a moral person, or to be viewed as one who is a part of the moral universe, deserving of its normative rules and expectations.

The consequences of Dennett's views are thus quite startling: because no creature seems to answer to the title of "moral person," Dennett concludes that "the moral notion of a person and the metaphysical notion of a person are not separate and distinct concepts..."[78] And if we are to take Dennett seriously, we would then agree that the category of moral personhood is at best inconclusive, and at worst a category mistake, and most probably just an honorific, therefore disconnecting the worries about *personhood* from worries about morality.[79] Just as we are unable to prove with any degree of certainty that any entity actually

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[77] *See* Au, Derrick K. S., "Brain Injury, Brain Degeneration, and Loss of Personhood," *The Moral Status of Persons*, ed. Gerhold K. Becker (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000).

See also Brison, Susan J., "Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity," *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997); Brett, Nathan, "Dementia, Critical Interests and Euthanasia," *Moral Issues in Global Perspective*, ed. C. Koggel ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999); Nelson, Hilde Lindemann, "What Child Is This?" *Hastings Center Report* 32.6 (2002): 29-38.

[78] Dennett 193.

has a given belief structure, so we are also unable to offer any sufficient conditions that would entitle us to draw a link between identity and normativity, and thereby grant persons *the moral status*, apart from mere metaphysics, that they might merit.

This view strikes me as compelling yet somehow unsatisfying. On the one hand, it seems to set up an unnecessarily (perhaps artificially) stringent test for personhood, while on the other, it calls the notion of moral personhood into question altogether, explaining it as the result of unwarranted assumptions about human actions. Even if we grant Dennett the six conditions of personhood as he has conceives of them, his skepticism about the impossibility of satisfying them does not seem altogether justified. Although it might be difficult – indeed, *very* difficult – to tell when one truly intends to do *x*, or when one is really taking a reciprocal stance toward another, it does not necessarily follow that the satisfaction of these conditions is either arbitrary or impossible. It seems to me that we could engage in a long, imperfect process, involving equal parts empirical research and philosophical theorizing, and while our conclusions might not be fully unimpeachable, they might at least point us in the right direction. The claim that since we cannot know for sure whether *S* really has the belief that *y* says less about the existence of persons as uniquely moral entities, and more about the methodology and standards that Dennett employs.

Moreover, Dennett's final claim regarding the difficulty that the notion of personhood encounters when faced with bad behavior brings into focus his puzzling take on what moral personhood, if it were possible, would be like. It seems unconvincing at best to say that if Jones commits a crime, we are less sure that he is a person. If Jones has indeed

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[79] In fact, Dennett notes that

> "It might turn out, for instance, that the concept of a person is only a free-floating honorific that we are all happy to apply to ourselves, and to others as the spirit moves us, guided by our emotions, aesthetic sensibilities, considerations of policy and the like."

See Dennett, *Brainstorms*, 268.

committed a crime, a number of things could be true: He might have done so intentionally, and thus fully exercised his agency in planning and carrying out the crime. He might have been criminally negligent, and simply not cared about either the law or moral norms. In either or both cases, he might have acted with glee, with regret, with fear, with awareness that he was committing a crime, or out of sheer (willful or accidental) ignorance or the law and mores of his surroundings. He might have acted because he (rightly or wrongly) thought that his actions would avert a greater crime, thus sacrificing himself (and his subsequent freedom) for what he took to be a higher cause.

In other words, the number of stories that we could tell in explaining the course of a particular crime and the motivations of a particular criminal are many, implicating his intent, his motivations, his choices – indeed, his *agency*. But none of them goes as far as putting his *personhood* on trial, or at least not in the zero-sum way that Dennett suggests – especially not if, as I suggest here, personhood is a much more complex notion than Dennett's binary analysis implies. We might say, for instance, that Jones is fully responsible for his choices (or not responsible for them at all due to circumstances or incapacity, or only responsible for some and not others), but what is on trial are his *choices and actions in a given situation or case* – not his being *in toto*, not his status as someone who is a part of our normative universe. Put more simply, if Jones stole a car, in judging him, the judge and the jury are not deciding whether Jones is a person in the moral sense – the fact that he is in a court, facing his peers, making his case, receiving uptake and giving uptake to the words of others is sufficient proof of that. They are deciding whether he, as a morally responsible agent, is deserving of a given punishment for a particular act. (Indeed, even were Jones declared incapacitated, it would not be his personhood but his agency that would be viewed as impaired).

Thus, does the fact that Jones was being bad – that he engaged in an activity that he knows to be immoral, forbidden, or both – necessarily negate his moral personhood, as Dennett suggests? This does not seem to be the case. If Dennett can be interpreted as saying that beings are persons (in the moral sense) only given certain actions, then personhood acts as an "on/off" switch – "on" for those of us who do not perform certain actions, and "off" for those who do. Ostensibly, personhood then (1) is the thinnest of concepts, not being applicable to anything other than particular sorts of behaviors, (2) requires a curious sort of moral perfection on the part of persons, or (3) as per Dennett, is a mere honorific – a laudatory title, awarded for good behavior that is within the norms of a given individual's society. Possibilities (1) and (2), I suggest, are less than satisfactory, and carry with them the disturbing implication that a large proportion of person-like entities are currently walking the Earth who are not persons at all (or, at least not persons in the *moral sense*), but who nevertheless cleverly fool us into thinking otherwise. Possibility (3) is puzzling because, if it really is the case that personhood as a moral concept has no independent substantive existence, it is not clear at all why Dennett would engage in this kind of rigorous analysis of its necessary and sufficient conditions, unless his intent all along was to require the sorts of standards that he already knew (or at least reasonably suspected) no single human being could meet at all times. In this case, Dennett's criticism of personhood as a moral concept seems to be an exercise in straw-man toppling, and is neither very informative nor an especially convincing view of human identity in general or individual identity in particular.

Moreover, his conclusions, somewhat like Locke's, problematize what we might mean by "persons": We might challenge Locke by arguing that one is a person in the moral sense (*or, the same person in the moral sense*) even if one's memory of one's past actions is failing

or inexact. We might similarly challenge Dennett by suggesting that if it is possible to judge someone to be a person at all, it might very well be possible judge her to be *a good person, a bad person, or anything in between.* That is, just as Locke's necessitarianism about memory in cases of moral identity is unnecessarily stringent and limiting, so is Dennett's list of requisite characteristics, unless by "person" or "personhood" we are merely bestowing an honorific or have in mind a very narrow range of possibilities of what moral personhood implies.

Of course, the problematization of "personhood" as a special moral designation is precisely Dennett's project, but here is where it falls short. In trying to define personhood as a matter of satisfying six necessary conditions, Dennett

a. Offers criteria that perhaps begin to define a paradigmatic human being (that is, they might sketch out the general conception about a creature called a "human being") but attribute nothing that is especially and uniquely characteristic of human beings. Indeed, it is possible to imagine other life forms (Martians, other advanced primates, laboratory-altered animals, and so on) fitting into all six of these criteria without also requiring us to concoct improbable, fantastical hypotheticals (even more fantastical than Martians!),

and

b. Offers criteria that are arbitrary. As some have noted, why not include tool use, or the ability to empathize, or write books, or,

indeed, form theories?[80] These criteria, in turn, seem to function as a sort of a theoretical straw man.

and

c. Like Locke, includes the notion of self-consciousness as necessary. However, do we not feel compelled to attribute self-consciousness to those who fulfill the other five criteria – sometimes as a *prerequisite* for the other "requirements" that Dennett proposes?[81]

and

d. Potentially makes an error in parallel construction, or perhaps even a category mistake. Willingness to adopt an intentional stance toward other people and being the sort of creature who is the recipient of the intentional stances of others are qualitatively different criteria from rationality, linguistic ability, and perhaps even conscience.[82] Yet, Dennett includes them in his list as if they are all similarly evaluable, among other things conflating moral personhood and moral agency.

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[80] Kathleen V. Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 25. *See also* Jerry Goodenough, "The Achievement of Personhood," *Ratio* 2 (1997): 146.

[81] Goodenough 146.

[82] Goodenough 146-147.

Although *a-d* all represent serious concerns about Dennett's overall structure and conclusions, it is *a* and *d* that worry me most, for they appear to be symptomatic of Dennett's refusal to qualitatively distinguish properties. Dennett's argument is based on the assumption that capacities for language, rationality, intentional stances (toward someone and to oneself), and so on, can be correctly attributed (or not) to an abstract individual in the same way. But this may not be the case. That is, I might be able to utter words while alone, or be conscious of my surroundings or memories while in isolation,[83] yet, be unable to be the giver, or especially the receiver, of intentional states. What this suggests is that linguistic abilities, rationality, and so on might be viewed more as intrinsic capacities, while intentional stances involving receivers and recipients appear to be more relational. Intentional states, then, might only be properly evaluated while one is "partaking in a form of life."[84] As Wilfrid Sellars tells us,

> To think of a featherless biped as a person is to think of it as a being with which one is bound up in a network of rights and duties....[It is]to construe its behaviour in terms of actual or potential membership in an embracing group each member of which thinks of itself as a member of the group....The most embracing community to which he belongs consists of those with whom he can enter into meaningful discourse....Thus to

[83] I am not here addressing the process of language formation or the development of rationality, strictly speaking. I am quite sympathetic with the views that language can only appear through a web of uses and relations, as can the understanding of what we might mean by "rational." What I am suggesting here is that it is possible, having learned a language or the concept of the "rational" to be a practitioner in isolation, say, on a deserted island, while the same might not be possible in cases of taking intentional stances, or being the recipient of intentional stances, on such an island.

[84] Goodenough 147.

> recognize a featherless biped or dolphin or Martian as a person is to think of oneself and it as belonging to a community.[85]

In other words, intentional stances create moral universes in which various selves come to offer mutual recognition to each other through the establishment of moral norms. I suspect (although I have yet to argue) that this norm-making might have something to do with the creation of the identities of those who participate in these norm-making communities (and those who are kept out), perhaps granting this process a kind of a moral privilege that Dennett seems to deny. What clearly does seem to be the case is that the task of moral personhood-making is one that is easily evaluated by neither a checklist of necessary conditions to be satisfied, nor by examining each individual in isolation from her relations in the world. In trying – and apparently failing – to connect the notions of 'personhood' and 'morality,' and by subsequently concluding that "the moral notion of a person and the metaphysical notion of a person are not separate and distinct concepts," Dennett not only gives up on the idea that the definition of *personhood* can have a moral element, but also precludes any further evaluation of identity, however framed, as a normatively efficacious – thus, negating the potential moral import of anything like the *identities of individuals.* His analysis leaves us with either no distinctions between the metaphysical person and the moral one, or else grants the moral distinctions only the dubious status of an honorific. And this, in my view, sells the enterprise short.

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[85] Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," *Science, Perception and Reality,* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1963) 39. *See also* Goodenough 147.

ii. The Return of the Psychological Criterion (Dennett and the Role of Narrative)

While I take issue with Dennett's apparent dismissal of the possibility of moral personhood, and by extension, of a morally grounded *identity of individuals*, I do believe it is important to note his views on identity formation and the self, which very usefully introduce the concept of *narrative* into identity-talk. Moreover, his use of the psychological criterion of identity – albeit with rather startling results – is also worth noting, if only as an example of how it can be *misused.* My reasons for noting his contributions are thus a combination of agreement and puzzlement: while I agree with his overall notion of the importance of narrative in identity formation, I take his eventual position on the irreality of the 'self' to be troubling.[86] I begin with a brief discussion about his irrealism about the self.

Dennett begins with a few intuitions. Although "our vision of ourselves as responsible, free, rational agents, and our vision of ourselves as complex parts of the physical world of science"[87] might seem to conflict, he offers what he takes to be a middle position, at least as it concerns our *selves.* Take something like the concept of the "center of gravity." It is after all, a "theorist's fiction" – an abstract object to which we can appeal when looking for causal explanations. Centers of gravity play a crucial role in physics, and can be identified in space and time, included or excluded from considerations, and so on –

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[86] Daniel Dennett," The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* ed. Pamela M. Cole, Dale L. Johnson, and Frank S. Kessel (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992) 103.

See also Nicholas Humphrey and Daniel C. Dennett, "Speaking for our selves: an assessment of multiple personality disorder," *Raritan*, 9.1 (1989): 68-98.

See also Daniel Dennett, "The Origins of Selves," *Cogito* 3 (1989): 163-73, reprinted in Daniel Kolak and R. Martin, eds., *Self & Identity: Contemporary Philosophical Issues.* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

[87] Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996) x.

and yet, they can never be observed.[88] Moreover, they are entirely circumscribed by the theory which has created them. That is, they have a "nicely defined, well delineated and well behaved role within physics" – no more and no less.[89] But just because centers of gravity are fictitious, they are not unimportant:

> But when I say it's a fictional object, I do not mean to disparage it; it's a wonderful fictional object, and it has a perfectly legitimate place within serious, sober, *echt* physical science.[90]

Dennett then makes an interesting move: could the entity we call "the self" be just such a "center of gravity?" he wonders. Yes and no. On the one hand, 'the self,' unlike a

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[88] "Let me remind you how robust and familiar the idea of a center of gravity is. Consider a chair. Like all other physical objects, it has a center of gravity. If you start tipping it, you can tell more or less accurately whether it would start to fall over or fall back in place if you let go of it. We're all quite good at making predictions involving centers of gravity and devising explanations about when and why things fall over. Place a book on the chair. It, too, has a center of gravity. If you start to push it over the edge, we know that at some point will fall. It will fall when its center of gravity is no longer directly over a point of its supporting base (the chair seat). Notice that that statement is itself virtually tautological. The key terms in it are all interdefinable. And yet it can also figure in explanations that appear to be causal explanations of some sort. We ask "Why doesn't that lamp tip over?" We reply "Because its center of gravity is so low." Is this a causal explanation? It can compete with explanations that are clearly causal, such as: "Because it's nailed to the table," and "Because it's supported by wires."

"We can manipulate centers of gravity. For instance, I change the center of gravity of a water pitcher easily, by pouring some of the water out. So, although a center of gravity is a purely abstract object, it has a spatio-temporal career, which I can affect by my actions. It has a history, but its history can include some rather strange episodes. Although it moves around in space and time, its motion can be discontinuous. For instance, if I were to take a piece of bubble gum and suddenly stick it on the pitcher's handle, that would shift the pitcher's center of gravity from point A to point B. But the center of gravity would not have to move through all the intervening positions. As an abstractum, it is not bound by all the constraints of physical travel."

Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

[89] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

[90] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

center of gravity, "whose sole property is their spatio-temporal position," has "a spatio-temporal position that is only grossly defined."[91] That is,

> Brain research may permit us to make some more fine-grained localizations, but the capacity to achieve *some* fine-grained localization does not give one grounds for supposing that the process of localization can continue indefinitely and that the day will finally come when we can say, "That cell there, right in the middle of hippocampus (or wherever)–that's the self!"[92]

On the other hand, answering in the affirmative, Dennett claims that, like 'the center of gravity,' 'the self' is both fictional (as a character in a book), and constituted by the hermeneutics and phenomenology akin to a folk explanatory theory. Just as we posit centers of gravity for our purposes in the physical sciences, so we posit selves because we have a need (much more than an academic one) to both understand and interpret human behavior.[93] In short, as human beings, we are fiction-writers and storytellers – we are the starring actors in our own first-person dramas and comedies, with the "center of gravity" tantamount to what we are in the habit of calling our "selves."

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[91] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

[92] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

[93] Dennett notes that,

"In fact we have to posit selves for *ourselves* as well. The theoretical problem of self-interpretation is at least as difficult and important as the problem of other-interpretation."

Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

A distinction needs to be drawn here – a distinction that Dennett himself does not offer, or at least not very clearly. He tells us that "the chief fictional character at the center of...autobiography is one's *self*. And if you still want to know what the self *really* is, you're making a category mistake."[94] So far as good. However, at this point, we might wonder if Dennett is suggesting that selves *are* stories, or that they are *represented* by stories. He seems to want to claim both: On the one hand, *selves are fully represented by stories*: they are convenient fictions, and are nothing over and above the stories in which they appear, and which constitute them. On the other hand, they are these odd, fictional entities which are "in the center" of our self-stories. And even though there is no reality to them outside of these stories, they exist to the extent that fictional characters can be said to exist – they function as the organizing principles of events and narratives around which the vast number of stories circulate. It seems that this distinction, which I take to be a crucial one when addressing issues of identity and selfhood (as various issues, such as who is telling the story and who is the 'subject' of the story, are implicated) is secondary for Dennett, whose primary aim appears to be the argument for the irreality, or the un-reification, of the self. After all, our intuition might tell us that if selves are the sorts of things about which more or less accurate stories can be told, then there must be *something real* about them, something that can be discussed, examined, analyzed, and so on. And it is this reality that Dennett does not allow. Instead he offers the following:

> We sometimes encounter psychological disorders, or surgically created disunities, where the only way to interpret or make sense of them is to posit

[94]Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

> in effect two centers of gravity, two selves. One isn't creating or discovering a little bit of ghost stuff in doing that. One is simply creating another abstraction. It is an abstraction one uses as part of a theoretical apparatus to understand, and predict, and make sense of, the behavior of some very complicated things. The fact that these abstract selves seem so robust and real is not surprising. They are much more complicated theoretical entities than a center of gravity. And remember that even a center of gravity has a fairly robust presence, once we start playing around with it. But no one has ever seen or ever will see a center of gravity. As David Hume noted, no one has ever seen a self, either.[95]

Dennett's selves, then, just are autobiographical stories, or the "centers" around which these stories circulate, which are sometimes coherent, sometimes not – stories that we tell to ourselves and to others about what we remember, believe, fear. And about what we think we are doing, thinking, or saying, or what we want others to think we are doing, thinking, or saying. And, as such, they are useful fictions.

There are a few qualifications: the sorts of fictions that we are – or the stories that our selves are – do not resemble the *fait accompli* fictions such as *Don Quixote*, *Crime and Punishment*, or *Thelma and Louise* because while we are alive, our stories remain incomplete. That is, unlike a work of fiction that already has a first and a last page, while we live, we are still capable of narrating in some way, of adding new chapters to the stories of our lives. Thus, in our narratives the car might, while the credits have not yet rolled, make it to the

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[95] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

other side of the Grand Canyon. And even if some chapters have already been "written," nothing in these autobiographies is every truly finished, but, as result of interactions with the world and other beings, is always subject to refinement, change, and revision in an attempt to make our stories cohere with both what we take to be the case, and what we experience in the world.[96]

Moreover (and rather controversially), Dennett suggests that even the narrative centers of gravity that we call our "selves" are not necessarily singular. For whatever reasons, including Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) and certain surgical procedures, if

> a human being's behavioral control system becomes seriously impaired, it can turn out that the best hermeneutical story we can tell about that individual says that there is more than one character "inhabiting" that body..... This is quite possible on the view of the self that I have been presenting; it does not require any fancy metaphysical miracles. One can discover multiple selves in a person just as unproblematically as one could find Early Young Rabbit and Late Young Rabbit in the imagined Updike novels: all that has to be the case is that the story doesn't cohere around one self, one imaginary point, but coheres (coheres much better, in any case) around two different imaginary

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[96] In fact, Dennett suggests that we do not merely have different narrator-selves by which we tend to "identify our "selves" – in fact, the picture is even more complex, whereby we "have our various *personae* in the various roles we play day to day."

See Daniel Dennett, "The Origins of Selves," *Cogito* 3 (1989): 163-73, reprinted in Daniel Kolak and R. Martin, eds., *Self & Identity: Contemporary Philosophical Issues.* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

> points....where the only way to interpret or make sense of them is to posit in effect two centers of gravity, two selves.[97]

However, by allowing these new "selves," we are not admitting to "finding" them in the psyche – or anywhere else, for that matter. Instead, we are "simply creating another abstraction....one uses as part of a theoretical apparatus to understand, and predict, and make sense of, the behavior of some very complicated things."[98] For whatever reasons we might have, we are multiplying fictions, writing new biographies that might or might not have anything in common with other biographies similarly constructed. We are creating our "selves," our notions of who we are, out of our conscious psychological (or, in the case of mental illness, perhaps less conscious) desire to make sense of the world. We thus narratively posit this "self" as our definitive moral "core" which ostensibly differentiates us not only from non-humans, but from other human selves. And yet, Dennett reminds us, this "core" is not actually there.

I must admit that I am sympathetic to Dennett's introduction of narrative into his discussion of self-formation. On the face of it, the processes of shaping the self by telling stories at times do sound a bit like possible accounts of the *identities of individuals* – that is, they sound like the narrative approach that I intend to defend later in the dissertation. At first, it seems that unlike Locke's somewhat limiting notion of identity, Dennett's view of 'self'-creation seems to allow for a narrative fluidity which is not bound by exacting specifications and necessary categories. But then we notice something rather odd.

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[97] Daniel C. Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," *Center for Cognitive Studies*, 2004, Tufts University, 11 July 2007 <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm>.

See also F. Kessel, P. Cole and D. Johnson, eds., *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992).

[98] Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity."

First, there seems to be a problem with the motivational efficacy of Dennett's theory. Recall that Dennett begins with the premise that each human being weaves a 'self'-identity through storytelling out of the threads of psychological motivations and experiences in the world. Indeed, he claims that this is just something that we, as human beings, do. Yet if we take him to be (at least provisionally) correct in asserting that the self is a mere theorists' fiction, ought we not also demand that he provide us with an explanatory account *of why we engage in this narrative, fiction-creating activity in the first place?* And ought not this account be non-question-begging in that it must not appeal to 'selves' in order to explain our 'self'-creating tendencies? In other words, it does not seem to be sufficient for identity theorists, including Dennett, to explain away the self as a theoretical, narrative fiction by merely insisting that in creating 'selves,' "we all do it" as part and parcel of being the sorts of creatures that we happen to be. An *explanation* is owed as to *why* we seem to do it – and a cursory nod at the metaphor of fiction writing, along with an unexamined assumption that we appear to engage in this behavior in our daily lives, simply do not do the complex notion of self-narration justice. Locke, for instance, motivated his theory of why we would want to be moral selves – why we would want to participate in identity-constituting moral deliberations and actions – by appealing to our concerns about judgment, and especially about the sort of ultimate judgment that nobody could avoid. However, no such motivating account is provided by Dennett, leaving his theory speechless as to *why* we engage in this activity that is seemingly so *fundamental* to our sense of who we are.

This worry about Dennett's lack of a motivational account, however, might be grounded in something that is even more troubling. His claim that "out of its brain [the human being] spins a web of words and deeds, and, like the other creatures, it doesn't have

to know what it is doing; it just does it"[99] is instructive, and brings me to the second problem: Because this making of the self through stories is taken by him to be an activity more akin to eating than to meaning-making, we might sensibly conclude that Dennett's views are based on an apparent conflation of the descriptive and normative aspects of identity and identity formation, a dismissal of any possible normative aspect of identity and identity formation, or both. It seems to me that "both" is a reasonable answer, especially if we recall his earlier claims that there is no distinct moral sense of "person," or indeed, of *the criteria for personhood.*

Specifically, if there is no possibility of a connection between identity and morality (that is, if there is no sense of identity's being a source of normativity or having some substantial relation to normativity), then Dennett's account of how "selves" are created through fiction-like narratives is not at all surprising. After all, if there is no apparent normative baggage that identity formation brings (or, it seems, that it is even capable of bringing, given that it is something that we, reflexively, "just do"), we might as well take the stories of individuals' lives as we happen to find them – assuming, perhaps, that they are merely following their desires, beliefs, observations, and so on. And little else. We do not have to worry very much, therefore, about the morally thorny issue of constraints on story-telling and uptake of stories (and thus identity-building) – say, silencing through discrimination due to gender, race, illness, or disability. If the self is really what Dennett takes it to be – an abstraction, a fiction created by our bodies in response to our need to represent ourselves to the world and to draw boundaries between "us" and "not us" – then it seems that how this is done is merely a matter of aesthetic preference, *of taste.* Some will prefer romance novels, some mysteries, and some adventure stories.

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[99] Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996) 409.

Moreover, even if "self"-stories are exactly what Dennett considers them to be, we might still ask why he takes them to be told and shaped only (or primarily) from a first-person perspective. In other words, can works of fiction not be co-written – and can not editorial input (that is, input from sources other than the "writer") be quite often outcome-determinative in terms of what is included and what is kept out of the narrative? And if self-creation is not a matter of moral concern for Dennett, we might still wonder why he had not taken into account, at least descriptively, the multi-level, complex structures of story-making.

In the end, it seems that very few of Dennett's conclusions about the self and identity are either philosophically or intuitively satisfying. Perhaps this is another reason that we ought to re-consider the strengths of his claims that the only difference between our identities and the identities of fictional characters is that we might still have chapters left to write. Indeed, this odd distinction, like so much of Dennett's theory of "self"-making, may, after all, not be very germane or informative for the complex, and potentially normatively vital, process of identity formation.

c. Parfit's "impersonal" person

While Locke initiated the (modern) discourse on identity and identity formation and Dennett reduced the project to an exercise of creative fiction that is at best morally suspect, Derek Parfit offers a diachronic account of *personal identity* that is deeply rooted in the psychological persistence criterion – specifically, in the question of the extent and conditions in which a person at time t_1 is identical with an entity that exists at time t_2. In short, Parfit wants to know how we "survive" with the passage of time, who this "we" might be, and what matters in "our" survival. In answering these questions, I claim he *(a)* neglects the role

of our physical bodies (that is, the somatic part of our worries about persistence), and *(b)* leaves large explanatory gaps in the relationship between our identities and what matters to us morally about those identities, even though he seems to want to draw such a connection. While in the next chapter (Chapter III) I will address what is perhaps the most serious criticism of Parfit's views of identity: his failure to contend with the issue of the *identities of individuals*. Here I will offer a brief outline of his views and then examine the various criticisms to which they appear to be vulnerable.

Parfit begins with the premise that we are confused – confused when we say that we care about personal identity as a special kind of notion, both because we mistakenly take the "self" or a "person" to be a special entity that is somehow different from the sum total of one's thoughts and one's body. In order to avoid such confusion, Parfit proposes a particular kind of "impersonal" reductionism which can, ostensibly, clarify what we mean by, and what really matters in, "personal identity":

> The fact of personal identity through time consists only in taking account of certain particular facts which can be described without presupposing personal identity and without explicitly supposing that the experiences in the life of this person are possessed by them or without even explicitly supposing that this person exists. One can describe these facts in an impersonal manner.[100]

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[100] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 210.

Also see Atkins, Kim, "Personal Identity and the Importance of One's Own Body: A Response to Derek Parfit," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8.3 (2000): 329–349.

Thus, he suggests that we cannot sensibly argue for a unified picture of identity by insisting that there exists an "underlying" entity called a "person" to whom we can ascribe all the elements of a conscious life. Instead, *(a)* persons are collections of experiences and mental states over time, which are *(b)* connected by a serious of causal relations, the most important of which is memory (however, it is not necessary for every time-slice entity to recall all the memories of the preceding ones). In other words, persons are bundles of psychological states moving through time, and as such, have no independent existence.

This reductionism about identity involves four specific claims:

1. Numerical identity of one's body is not essential to identity
2. Personal identity can be satisfactorily described in wholly impersonal terms (that is, the Relation R– a kind of a psychological connectedness or continuity.)
3. An account of the existence of persons is not essential for a complete description of reality.
4. The only alternative to this sort of reductionism is the "further fact view." (This is Parfit's argument that anything other than the Relation R is an absurd positing of a "further fact" about identity, such as notions about souls or other sorts of metaphysical chimeras).[101]

Parfit *dispenses* with any pretense about "anything further" about us other than the continuation of memories, desires, thoughts, likes and dislikes, and so on, through time. We therefore do not have to worry about anything like criteria for personhood, personal identity,

[101] Parfit.

or identities of individuals – or, frankly, about anything special about us that would separate us from other kinds of beings. The only way we "go on," and the only way in which it matters, Parfit suggests, is if some psychological traits survive through a "Relation R" – nothing more, nothing less.

Parfit, therefore, redefines the possibility of continuous selves, challenging the intuition that there is a deep, significant definition of "my identity" that needs to be sharpened and clarified. The wrong questions are being asked, he suggests, and the wrong criteria mapped out in trying to capture the notion of "identity." He tells us that

> Personal identity is not what matters. I claim: What matters is Relation R: psychological connectedness and/or continuity with the right kind of cause.[102]

Thus, what matters in the debate about personhood and identity is not some mysterious thing called "personal identity," but psychological continuity and connectedness. My "former self" and my "later self" might have various levels of continuity: in some cases, my continuation through time seems to be fairly assured (because I seem to have very similar psychological and physical characteristics), and in other cases, my "future self" is quite different from my "former self." Psychological continuity is dependent on my desires, belief structures, my personality, my loves and hates. Similarly, my physical continuity is dependent upon the physical similarities between my temporally separated selves, but matters much less than psychological continuity (or, in fact, not at all). What should matter in terms of my survival, in other words, is not that there is someone alive in the future who

[102] Parfit 215.

is identical *to* me, but that there merely be one person who is psychologically continuous *with* me. If we continue insisting that personal identity, as we nonreductionists tend to understand it, necessarily involves the survival of both a body and a mind (even if we define this "mind" as a set of psychological states), we fail to see what is really important to survival. What gives judgments about identity any (moral) importance is that they demonstrate a psychological continuity between what we like to call our "selves" and future instantiations of these selves," even if they do not resemble us in any obvious way.

How does any of this work – and why does it seem so counterintuitive? Let us begin with Parfit's "Teletransporter" thought experiment:

> I enter the Teletransporter [that] will send me [to Mars] at the speed of light. When I press the button I shall lose consciousness, and then wake up at what seems a moment later. In fact I shall have been unconscious for about an hour. The Scanner here on Earth will destroy my brain and body, while recording the exact events of all my cells. It will then transmit this information by radio. Travelling at the speed of light, the message will take three minutes to reach the Replicator on Mars. This will then create, out of new matter, a brain and a body exactly like mine. It will be in this body that I shall wake up.[103]

After some time, a new Teletransporter is built that works without destroying my brain, and instead, harmlessly records and sends a perfect blueprint of it to Mars, where a

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[103] Parfit 199.

See also Atkins 329–349.

new body is reassembled. Yet, while I am being scanned, the scanning process manages to destroy my vital organs (on Earth), and while my prognosis here is quite poor, my twin on Mars has suffered no such damage. Parfit then tells us that, given that my replica on Mars (complete with my brain scan) thinks that it is indeed *me* and remembers my life up to the point of the scanning fiasco, the replica can subsequently *continue my life*.[104]

> Since my Replica knows I am about to die, he tries to console me with the same thoughts with which I recently tried to console a dying friend. It is sad to learn, on the receiving end, how unconsoling these thoughts are. My Replica assures me that he will take up my life where I leave off. He loves my wife, and together they will care for my children.[105]

Here, Parfit is trying to uncover our intuitions by motivating us to ask which one of these identities is really "me" – which identity is truly mine? But this is exactly the wrong question to ask – there is nothing, no "further fact," that is a "self" or "person" who exists over and above the various traits imported from one entity to the next. And this is not an altogether bad thing, even ethically speaking, for one consequence of this view is that we ought to pay as much attention to our quasi-survivors (who inherit only a part of our psychological baggage) as to ourselves. It is, therefore, an equally worthwhile endeavor to worry about surviving and quasi-surviving: for example, I ought to be concerned about potential future continuations of myself, whoever they might be, and whether or not they are

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[104] *See* Atkins 329–349.

[105] Parfit. 201.

"actually me." Ethically, this opens us up to the possibility of caring about not harming others, if only for the reason that in the future, they might be our psychological successors. Moreover, it makes us less self-centered identity-seekers: if there is nothing to seek that is uniquely mine, then perhaps the alternative is to maintain a level of concern for all who might potentially be my successors. And this could encompass quite a number of people or potential people. Nevertheless, Parfit's reductionism seems to raise more worries than it settles, and I now turn to a preliminary discussion of the ones I find most significant.

i. Some Initial Concerns

I begin by offering a few more reasons to charitably read Parfit's argument. Indeed, he rescues the notion of "identity" from an all-or-nothing analysis. Since identity, on his view, is constituted over time in degrees of continuity between later and former selves, we need never speak of identity as being "there" or being "missing." In a sense, by reducing identity to this fluctuating stream of psychological states, Parfit is telling us not to worry about any "further facts" about what we mean when we speak of human identity – and especially identity through time. The psychological spectrum might range from total continuity (where nothing changes either physically or psychologically), to a more tenuous connection (where some physical and psychological characteristics may be altered), to total breakdown of continuity in some important aspect of either or both spectra (for instance, where one's desires drastically change, or when one undergoes a serious physical transplant, such as the brain, or, more realistically, when someone might acquire a "new face" in the case of serious burns, and so on).

Why does Parfit think that we must accept his view? Perhaps the strongest reason he might suggest is that anything else is simply a category mistake. He offers the following hypothetical: If we were to split the two hemispheres of the brain and transplant each into different bodies, we are faced with the question of which body can be viewed as the continuation of the original, before the "splitting" experiment. He rejects the conclusions that "both," "one," or "neither" could possibly be the answer. The line, the point where the "deep further fact" of identity starts, Parfit tells us, is not present, as our "identities" can always said to be in flux, with no discernable "beginning "or "end" to separate where they change, when we are clearly someone else, or when we can say that "person x" no longer exists. Indeed, defining what *personal identity* might be – or how it might be manifested at any given time – is purely arbitrary, and is more a cultural habit rather than a philosophical, scientific, or, indeed a common-sensical designation.

Parfit's analysis can lead to some rather significant conclusions. First, this view of identity focuses us on what (presumably) *really matters* to human beings – psychological continuity, instead of some abstraction called "identity." When I worry about whether I will survive, perhaps it is my thoughts, beliefs, worries, and so on that I most want to persist through time. Second, as I noted earlier, Parfit's approach might be significant both psychologically and practically: it might move us to act in ways that promote the welfare of these future continuations of ourselves. If we continue beyond what we normally conceive of as our personal identity, the notion of "us" is expanded, while at the same time, the idea of a definable, locatable "identity" is given less weight. As long as some deep, psychological part of us goes on, we go on. And that is *all* that matters.

But there is a less charitable reading (with which I am more sympathetic), and some deep, potentially serious problems with Parfit's reductionism. In the rest of this section, I

introduce, and briefly sketch, several of these problems, and will then address them in detail in the following chapter (Chapter III).

First, recall that Parfit argues for an impersonal approach to identity, whereby reality can exist without the claim that persons also exist. But this seems odd, for it denies a connection between personal identity and thoughts, experiences, desires, and so on. If these thoughts, experiences and desires do not belong to anyone because there is not anyone to "own" them, then either *(a)* we have a case of a bizarre metaphysics of free-floating psychological states, or *(b)* Parfit makes a serious error in failing to grant these psychological states owners, thereby grounding them in the bodies and minds of these owners. Both *(a)* and *(b)* potentially betray not only a very strong preference for a psychological criterion of personal identity (over the somatic criterion), but also a strange approach to the psychological criterion itself, not only failing to anchor it to a body, but also to any particular entity's psychological composition. Thus, if we are to follow Parfit, whatever connections we desire to draw between personal identity and ethical worries ought to be based, it seems, on something other than the fact of embodied selves – of embodied identities. I suggest (and will argue in the next chapter) that such an impersonal view represents a misreading of the relationship of one's psychological states and one's body, and subsequently, of one's identity and ethical concerns.[106]

Second, Parfit's disembodied view of identity might leave one with the impression that we are nothing but our experiences, drifting through time. But this, perhaps quite deliberately, leaves out any concept of agency in his definition of identity. Following Christine Korsgaard, I will address the implications of his view for the relationship of

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[106] *See* Atkins 329–349.

See also Simon Woods, "Persons and personal identity," Nursing Philosophy 1 (2000): 169.

personal identity and morality.[107] While my goals are different from those of Korsgaard (my project is not the defense of a Kantian concept of identity) I nevertheless take her critique of Parfit to be well grounded in a legitimate concern about the role of agency in worries about identity, broadly construed.

Finally, there appears to be a difficulty with Parfit's "no further fact" argument that directly bears on my concern about the relative philosophical silence about *identities of individuals.* We might remember that Parfit tells us in the Teletransporter case that it really matters very little whether we appeal to a psychological or the physical criterion of identity in determining if the replica will be "me." For either of these criteria to be applicable, there must be a "further fact" about my existence – and there simply is not. Thus, the question of which criterion will determine the continued existence of my identity is a metaphysically, epistemically, and, indeed, ethically, empty question.

Yet this conclusion does not seem to hold if we consider an example not taken into account by Parfit. That is, there is no "further fact" about sisterhood over and above gender, ancestry (or adoption), the presence of others with whom to have a "sister-like" relationship, and so on. And there is also no "further fact" about the status of "bachelor" over and above questions of gender, marital status, and so on. Even if we seem to be convinced that this is indeed the case – that these are just tautologous definitions with *nothing further to define* – it does not mean that there is *no reason at all* to analyze both "sisterhood" and "bachelorhood." We can certainly attempt to meaningfully expand or limit these definitions, or try to understand them, for example, in terms of social relations (and not just tautological ones), and so on. We can, in other words, look for other criteria – for a better, deeper, more rigorous definition of whatever it is that we seek to define.

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[107] *See* Korsgaard, Christine M., *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1996).

Thus, just as it is not an empty gesture to seek another view of "sisterhood" and "bachelorhood," it is similarly not useless to seek an alternative to Parfit's reductionist psychological criterion of identity. Specifically, it is not a futile pursuit to define identity in terms other than experiences moving through time. In other words, it is not necessarily unwise to consider identity from the point of view of *identities of individuals.*

Given this less charitable reading, Parfit seems to be mistaken in (at least) two ways: First, he discounts the importance of a coherent self-conception (that is, a fuller story about oneself versus merely listing the conditions for the continuity of self in the future). Second (and perhaps more importantly), he does not distinguish what Geoffrey Madell[108] and Marya Schechtman[109] argue is the role of first-person intuitions that we all have of our continued *substantial* identity over time – of the question of "who am I?" that I have characterized as *identity of individuals.*

At least for the time being, it seems that Parfit's reductionism about identity is much too rigid on the one hand and much too unrigorous on the other, neglecting the very important subjective experience that we have of our own identity. The fundamental question of what it might mean to ask the question of who we are is neither addressed, nor satisfactorily explained away – it is merely dismissed as a non-issue. Yet these initial criticisms require further explication, and in the next chapter, I will address Parfit's silence about *identities of individuals,* along with worries about embodiment and agency. I will offer, partially following Marya Schechtman, a more informative, and more conceptually vivid, picture of how identity and morality intersect. I now turn to this task.

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[108] Geoffrey Madell, "Derek Parfit and Greta Garbo," *Analysis* 45 (1985): 105-109.

[109] *See* Schechtman, Marya, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

The real meditation is...the meditation on one's identity. Ah, voilà une chose!! You try it. You try finding out why you're you and not somebody else. And who in the blazes are you anyhow? Ah, voilà une chose!

– Ezra Pound, Letter, April 21, 1913, to Pound's fiancée (later wife) Dorothy Shakespear.

CHAPTER III: PARFIT, HIS CRITICS, AND THE TURN TOWARD A NARRATIVE CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY

I. Parfit and Identity: Some Initial Worries

Derek Parfit, it seems, has left us in a quandary: On the one hand, we are troubled by his dismissive approach to the role of a coherent self-conception (that is, a fuller story about oneself versus merely listing the conditions for the continuity of self in the future). On the other hand, the psychological criterion of personal identity that is at the core of his diachronic account does seem to be somewhat of an improvement over Locke's memory-driven views of identity (and personhood), or Dennett's somewhat dismissive approach to the criteria for moral personhood. Perhaps one of the reasons that Parfit's claims do hold some attraction over those of Locke and Dennett is that he simplifies and de-personalizes both the role and the nature of identity. He does not seem to be worried about the identity-personhood connection, nor does he take his task to be the creation of obstruction to any reification of personhood as a moral concept. Instead, he tells us that we are merely conceptually confused because (1) we are mistaken when we say that we care about personal identity as special notion, and (2) we are mistaken when we take the "self" or the "person" to be a special entity that is different from the sum total of our physical and psychological states. Thus, Parfit offers us an "impersonal" reductionism which precludes any unified

picture of identity of any metaphysical or moral entity called a "person," or an "I." Any stories of ourselves as persons – and the representations of those stories that are our identities – seem to be loosely held together psychological states, moving through time.

In fairness, the picture, at least as Parfit tells us, is not quite so simple. Indeed, in *Reasons and Persons*, he claims that:

> I am not a series of experiences, but the person who has these experiences. A Reductionist can admit that, in this sense, a person is what has experiences, or the subject of experiences. This is true because of the way in which we talk. What a Reductionist denies is that the subject of experiences is a separately existing entity, distinct from a brain and body, and a series of physical and mental events.[110]

Thus, it seems that Parfit is working quite hard to take on – and defeat – not merely Cartesian dualism, but the idea of a Lockean thinking substance which has a separate (and morally significant) existence.[111]

So far, so good: Indeed, I take issue with a number of conclusions to which Cartesian dualism might lead (which I will not address here). Moreover, Locke's claims, although helpful in framing the debate about identity, are, for reasons noted in an earlier

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[110] See Goodenough, Jerry, "Is There a Circularity Involved In Parfit's Reductionist View Of Personal Identity?", *Parfit, Identity and Thought Experiments* (Norwich: UEA Papers In Philosophy, 1995) <www1.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6304!is%20there%20a%20circularity%20involved%20in%20parfit.doc>.

See also Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 223.

[111] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Ch. XXVII, Sections 8-11, ILT Digital Classics, 1995, 5 July 2007 <http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/Projects/digitexts/locke/understanding/chapter0227.html>.

chapter, far too conceptually problematic. But Parfit's project is a bit more ambiguous and subversive. The ambiguity becomes apparent if we consider his thought experiments (the Teletransporter story, among others). In them, we can find no *de minimis* physical or psychological requirements – no epistemic or ontological minimums, so to speak – that would assure the continued existence of personal identity. We also fail to find any suggestions that Parfit thinks that these considerations about requirements warrant any further analysis. We are, in fact, thrown back on the realization that, on his view, all that matters is a continuation of a series of some number of mental events, unconnected to any sort of bodily reality or psychological structure.

If this is indeed the case, then it is rather difficult to reconcile the distinction that Parfit draws between a person having the experiences and the set of experiences itself (that is, the sort of distinction he makes in the previous quotation), as his hypotheticals tend to push us toward the insignificance of anything other than the psychological experiences or mental events. In fact, Parfit even tells us that

> different experiences are had by the same person....And we can refer to these experiences, and fully describe the relations between them, without claiming that these experiences are had by a person.[112]

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[112]Parfit 217.

See also John Perry, "Introduction," *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) 11.

Perry suggests that identity could be properly understood as a set of "unity relations between....nonsimultaneous person-stages."

See also Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 7.

This seems oddly contradictory and more than a bit ambiguous: At first, it seemed as if Parfit was indeed making the claim that the person and the experience were somehow different. Here, however, he seems to have taken the view that the existence of persons is not even necessary for the grounding of experience. This raises three worries: (1) Does Parfit take it that we could rigorously address our thoughts without also referring to the thinkers who have those thoughts? (2) If so, would this then not raise the thorny issue of individuation – that is, the question of what separates any mental particular of a given set of thoughts from another such set? After all, it does not seem altogether improbable that set membership would most likely be difficult to determine without some indication of an owner of such a set. (3) Finally, even if we could determine what a set of psychological phenomena comprises, how do we account for false and misleading memories, misrememberings, brainwashing, and so on?[113] Could the psychological phenomena that Parfit has in mind comprise something other than the kind that has actually been experienced? Could not the experiences that Parfit takes to be the only determining factors in Relation R be false, and not therefore a consistent representation of whoever or whatever it is that is "continuing" to persist in time? If there are indeed some criteria that make set B of experiences a continuation of set A, and set C not a continuation of set A, then there has to be some way, it seems to me, to be able to classify and distinguish A and B from C, but given that Parfit gives us no way of determining with any precision either the criteria of which experiences can be included or excluded from bundles to which they ostensibly belong, we are left in the position of making guesses – some less informed that others.

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[113] Goodenough. <www1.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6304!is%20there%20a%20circularity%20involved%20in%20parfit.doc>.

Indeed, it seems that in order to make a reasonable determination of why a particular experience belongs in one set (or bundle) rather than another and to avoid a seeming random assignment among them, we need something – or someone – in which (or in whom) these experience bundles could inhere. That is, we need a warrant, in the form of a thinker of thoughts, say, to be able to properly attribute a particular set of thoughts to thinker A and not thinker B. However, while

> it is, of course, open to Parfit to claim that individuating sets of mental particulars and providing membership conditions for mental individuals ought not to be part of a full description of mental particulars....such a position must inevitably weaken the attractiveness of Parfit's analysis in comparison with those philosophical psychologies which claim to be able to provide such conditions.[114]

Parfit, however, appears unconcerned. In fact, he takes himself to have accomplished his goal. He tells us that

> because we ascribe thoughts to thinkers, we can truly claim that thinkers exist. But we cannot deduce, from the content of our experiences, that a thinker is a separately existing entity. And, as Lichtenberg suggests, because we are not separately existing entities, we could fully describe our thoughts without claiming that they have thinkers. We could fully describe our

[114] Goodenough. <www1.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6304!is%20there%20a%20circularity%20involved%20in%20parfit.doc>.

> experiences, and the connections between them, without claiming that they are had by a subject of experiences. We could give what I call an impersonal description.[115]

Parfit's argument for this sort of "impersonal description" of identity allows us to see where he moves from the sort of ambiguity I noted earlier toward saying something subversive: If our experiences – and thus, given his views, our identities – ought to be understood impersonally, then the notion of personal identity as a means to draw distinctions among human beings (and human and nonhuman entities) is not merely challenged, but collapsed. The somewhat obfuscated purpose of this collapse, it seems, is nothing short of setting up a view of identity such that it would support, and indeed encourage, an impersonal, utilitarian approach to ethics, where the question of who has a given experience matters much less that the sum total of the experiences being considered. Thus, an impersonal understanding of identity leads to an impersonal ethic: we ought not concern ourselves too much with a particular someone who actually suffers the most pain (pleasure, receives the most attention, resources, etc.), as long as the net sum of happiness over suffering is maximized in general – even if that someone is an entity that we take to be ourselves.[116] Therefore, it seems that we should read Parfit as making two (related) moves: First, he is proposing new ways to look at personal identity as diachronic – as a matter of

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[115] Parfit 225.

See also Goodenough. <www1.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6304!is%20there%20a%20circularity%20involved%20in%20parfit.doc>.

[116] Although I will not offer an argument for or against such a theory, I do think that it is important to note that considerations of distributive justice that it engenders – that is, any thought of what might be a fair scheme of distribution of goods, of pain, or of anything else of (any sort) of value among individuals, societies, nations, and so on – are important considerations in any consideration of normativity.

reidentification only. Second, as a result of his initial claims that personal identity is merely a matter of reidentification, he finds a new way to dismiss it as a valid concern of either metaphysical or ethical inquiry (with the added project of trying to justify an ethical theory that does not, at least in its strongest form, rely on the concept of personal identity.[117]) This, of course, neither leaves room to consider the question of identities of individuals in any meaningful manner – in fact, it takes any worry about it to be beside the point. And it is this that I take to be most troubling.

II. Why Identity Matters: Four Possibilities

It seems that Parfit leaves us with an odd sense that identity is closer to an unnecessary vestige of bad metaphysics than to a conceptually solid object of concern. Identity, in Parfit's hands, becomes much less mysterious and certainly less normatively efficacious. On the one hand, Parfit makes the descriptive claim that any sense of an "I", any notion of an identity that is separate from the brain and the bundles of experiences, is simply a conceptual confusion about which there is no "further fact." On the other, he also seems to be making a normative claim that such a view of identity is desirable for a more utilitarian (and, on his view, just) conception of morality: if nothing is truly "mine" in the individualistic, and perhaps somewhat selfish, sense, then what matters is the quality of experiences in general – perhaps, the quality of experiences for all, even if the "all" is an impersonal one.[118]

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[117] *See* Garrett, Brian, *Personal Identity and Self-Consciousness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 83-94.

[118] In fact, Parfit argues that "it becomes more plausible to be more concerned about the quality of experiences, and less concerned about whose experiences they are. Parfit adds that "it becomes more plausible,

Yet both of his claims seem to have a singular effect: along with expanding the notion of what it means to "own" experiences, Parfit also does away with identity as a concept that is separate from a mere account of experiences and their interaction with a given brain. As a result, two important things are potentially destroyed. First, we lose the philosophical notion that the concept of identity unifies, in a very powerful way, a number of philosophical – metaphysical, epistemic, moral – concerns in a way that very few concepts do. Second, we can make no sense of the folk-psychological (or, more quotidian) worry about who we are. Instead, on Parfit's view, identity fades into the formulations of reidentification criteria. And while I take this fading to be neither necessary nor accurate, it remains the case that much of literature surrounding personal identity, and especially the psychological continuity literature that follows the tradition of Locke and Parfit, focuses precisely on this – the reidentification question that I define as the diachronic account of personal identity. This leaves us to wonder if indeed there is anything left to talk about – if my original concern about the identities of individuals has been subsumed, and indeed dismissed, by Parfit's solution.

Before offering any kind of a response, we must be very careful to make sure that we are clear as to what is being defended. While several different conceptions of identity could be the focus, here, I intend to argue for the folk-psychological intuition that there is indeed something to the question of "who am I?" Specifically, my claim is not merely that there is "something" to identity in the sense that we might have some emotional or psychological need to conceive of it as something real – even Parfit might agree that indeed, although such

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when thinking morally, to focus less upon the person....(and) to claim that....we are right to ignore whether experiences come within the same or different lives."

Parfit 341, 346.

See also Gruzalski, Bart, "Parfit's Impact on Utilitarianism," *Ethics* 96.4 (1986): 760-783.

a need might exist, it is nevertheless philosophically unjustified. My argument is stronger than that: I suggest that the worry about the identity of individuals[119] is grounded in the fact that identities are neither mere metaphysical ephemera nor useful semantic placeholders – they are real in the sense that they do things in the world. They are the representations of who we are to the world and to ourselves, and these representations serve as signals and symbols and signs as to how we are situated among others with respect to duties, rights, respect, love, visibility, opportunity, status, voice, responsibilities, and so on. Why this is the case – and why it is especially the case when we are deeply ill – I will begin to argue here, and then in greater detail in a later chapter. For now, I start with the proposition that this is a possibility we have to take seriously.

There are four initial arguments, which can be viewed as four objections to Parfit (and Parfit-like views): (1) the objection from embodiment (that is, the argument that identities are real because bodies are real – and ill bodies serve as particularly powerful reminders of this reality), (2) the objection from agency (that is, the argument that identities are real because we do not merely experience, but deliberate and decide, and therefore there must be a locus in which decisions are grounded), (3) the objection from narrative (that is, the view that identities are real if one asks the right sorts of questions and adopts a constitutive view of identity), and (4) the objection from third-person perspective (that is, the view that identities are not merely a matter of the success or failure of first-person agency, but are real because they give rise to normative expectations – we rely on them to understand how we may treat others who bear them, as well as how we ourselves may be

[119] My nonstandard account, identities of individuals, which is the question of who I am, how I see myself, how others see me, and what kinds of (social and moral) expectations this "seeing" sets up for me as a moral agent. The synchronic and diachronic accounts may play a role in this account of identity, but they are not outcome determinative, by which I mean that whatever their claims might be, individual identity requires a deeper, and less juridical, investigation into how we come to answer (and perhaps how we ought to answer) the question of who we are.

treated, as bearers of particular identities, by others.). By "real" in objection (3) what I mean is not just that identities are more than shorthand for "experience bundles," but that they are normatively efficacious representation to ourselves and to the world of our subjective, embodied experiences. Even though I mention it here in order to establish the scope of the possible objections to some standard views of identity, objection (4) will actually be discussed more fully in Chapters IV and V, although I do note it briefly in my discussion of the objection from agency. While I (for different reasons) take all four to be steps in the right direction, (1) and (3), and (4) tend to offer the sorts of arguments that I find to be much closer to the mark, although, as I will argue later, still requiring some theoretical refinement. I begin with the objection from embodiment.

a. The Objection from Embodiment: Individuated Identities Matter Because Individuated Bodies Matter

Recall Parfit's central argument: we can sensibly take account of certain facts about psychological experiences without also requiring that anyone possess these experiences. It is, in other words, an "impersonality thesis":

> The fact of personal identity through time consists only in taking account of certain particular facts which can be described without presupposing personal identity and without explicitly supposing that the experiences in the life of this person are possessed by them or without even explicitly supposing

that this person exists. One can describe these facts in an impersonal manner.[120]

A complete description of reality, therefore, can be had without persons – and certainly without anything like personal identity. One reason for this is the insubstantiality of what a "person" is: Parfit takes a "person" to be nothing over and above the many bundles of mental and physical states that change through time.

But, what are the implications of this move? As Kim Atkins argues, "Parfit is denying any essential relation between one's experiences being one's own and personal identity....[He] claims that thoughts don't essentially belong to someone because thoughts simply don't have owners."[121] Indeed, Parfit's sense of any experience being "mine" begins and ends with sets of related bodily and psychological events (and really, mainly psychological), which are rather vulnerable to all sorts of disruptions and discontinuities (thus rendering them no longer continuous). His many thought experiments are all offered with the intent of proving that there is no "further fact" about our identities, as they can, under appropriate conditions, be replicated in another body.

Specifically, Parfit's distinction between a body and personal identity is a rather curious one, where the body is viewed as a sort of a vessel – or a storage container – in which the various "I's" (or identities) can be inserted, from which they can be removed, and through which they can pass. The experiences which constitute these identities are just the information that the body processes, but, at least according to Parfit, the body itself adds

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[120] Parfit 210.

[121] Kim Atkins, "Personal Identity and the Importance of One's Own Body: A Response to Derek Parfit," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8.3 (2000): 331.

nothing to the status of something as an experience, or to the meaning and characteristics of that experience.[122]

In response to this stance of Parfit's I argue first, that the fact of our specific bodies matters in how our specific identities are constituted, therefore suggesting that there is indeed something to the notion of the identity of individuals in and through time; and second, following Atkins, [123] that this embodied perspective offers us a more complete, more complex picture of identity.

i. Why Bodies Matter in Identity Creation

I begin with the idea (for which I have argued earlier in this dissertation) that identities are in part constituted by first, second, and third-person interpretations and normalizations of those experiences. It therefore seems to me to be neither radical nor altogether difficult to imagine that our bodies – these flesh-and-bone entities that Parfit takes to be merely vessels of experience – are neither passive vessels nor, indeed, uninvolved in its creation, interpretation, and psychological meaning. One of the reasons for this, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty[124], among others, has argued, is that perception and consciousness (as well as other aspects of experiencing) are not abstract, theoretical constructs, but are

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[122] We might recall Parfit's claims that it is possible to offer a complete description of reality without at all referring to persons – and, I take him to be implying, especially to *embodied persons.*

[123] See Kim Atkins, "Personal Identity and the Importance of One's Own Body: A Response to Derek Parfit," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8.3 (2000): 329-349.

[124] *See* Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New Jersey: Routledge, 1992).

> an expression of a world articulated through one's body; the expression of a lived world. Here, the apparatus of perception is not a supersensible intellect, but one's body itself; consciousness is expressive of one's bodily participation in the world, in the broadest sense.[125]

Our bodies are neither somehow detached from experience, nor secondary to it (as Parfit would suggest). Simply, they are a part of the world in which we find ourselves, and what is more, they are our bridges into that world. And it is the ways in which they are bridges that serves to demonstrate how the existence of bodies necessitates the reality of identities in the sense that I noted above. These "bridges," I suggest, help to shape our identities as individuals by providing access to two vital senses in which we experience the world: first, the sense in which I exist as a unique and (semi-)coherent whole at any given point in time, and second, the sense in which I continue to exist as a unique and (semi-)coherent whole through time. I begin by examining the way in which I exist at any point in time.

First, it is through my body and it sense that I can learn hot, cold, touch, light, dark, sweet, up, down, and so on. To the extent that I am able, I situate myself in the world through physical, bodily experiences that, although shared by many, are my own. Second, it is also my body that teaches me about my abilities and limitations: It shows me that I cannot fly or see things that are out of my line of sight, but that I can run if scared and be very still, and peek around corners to see what might be there. It teaches me that I am probably no match for marathon runners or weightlifters, and most definitely not for speeding cars, or, on occasion, the angry honeybee. It shows me that I am not capable of solving many

[125] Atkins 335.

intellectual puzzles and that there are others who are far more able than I in so doing. Moreover, the body clarifies that it is not one of a kind in many respects when I catch and spread common illnesses, such as cold viruses, but that it is indeed singular when it is threatened by deep illness, isolating me in an anguish that, while shared in some ways among the afflicted, is in many important respects uniquely mine. It reminds me that I might not be able to walk fast, or at all, or that I am to use my ears, my hands, my skin, my sense of smell in place of my eyes. It may, someday, refuse to obey my desires, and through this refusal, tell me that my desires are no longer (or not for the moment) within my grasp. It might tell me to slow down. To be still. And as it both instructs me as to my possibilities and limitations, I begin to understand the sort of creature that I am in relation to all the other creatures, as well as the sort of creature that I am uniquely. In these ways, it helps to write the story of my identity as an individual. My perceptions, conceptions of, and actions in the world are in this sense both bound and made possible by my corporeal existence – by the reality of my particular embodiment (even though the facts or the qualities of my embodiment may change throughout my lifetime).[126] Thus, it seems that, quite contrary to Parfit's assertions, it is not only a fact that my body is something of which my identity needs to make sense, but perhaps the body is also necessary for the formation of the sort of experiences that Parfit claims count in psychological continuity.

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[126] "To say that something exists is to say that I maintain relations with it that are of the same type as those I maintain with my body; in other words, "to say that a thing exists is not only to say that it belongs to the same system as my body (that it is connected to my body by certain rationally determinable relations); it is to say that thing is in some fashion united to me as my body is united to me.'"

Richard Zaner, "The Mystery of the Body-Qua-Mine," *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, The Library of Living Philosophers*, volume xviii, ed. Paul Arthur Schipp and Lewis Edwin Hahn (La Salle: Open Court, 1984).

See also Atkins 336.

But my body is not merely the way through which I experience the world – it is the mirror through which the outside world views me. That is, the body which perceives is also perceived. I suggest that this perception happens in the following two ways: (1) My body perceives itself as itself[127], and (2) My body is perceived as me by others.

In the first case, I sense a bitter taste in my mouth, a headache, the touch of silk against my cheek, and so on. All of these experiences are definitely mine – unquestionably mine, in fact. If I were to question that these appendages moving before my eyes are actually my fingers, all I have to do, it seems, is to touch them to a hot stove to immediately realize that whatever "mine" means, they definitely have something to do with how the experience of touching the stove feels to me.[128] Indeed, it seems that I have no other way of seeing – of perceiving – the world and my body if not through the body itself. And not just through a body – it is through my body that I have the sorts of experiences that make me both aware of myself as a self that is distinct from other beings, and aware of the world as

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[127] Here, I am not entering the debate of whether we are just equivalent to our bodies, such as has been argued by those who endorse the somatic approach to identity, whether the bodily criterion of personal identity is correct (*See* Thomson, J. J., "People and Their Bodies," *Reading Parfit*, ed. J. Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) *and* Ayer, A. J., *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936)) or what it might mean for my body to actually be my body. (*See* van Inwagen, P., "Philosophers and the Words 'Human Body,'" *Time and Cause: Essays Presented to Richard Taylor*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980) 283-299; *and* Olson, E. 1997, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 144-149). I am simply making the claim that my body plays a significant role in how the theoretically abstract notion of identity becomes personalized and individualized.

[128] At least for my purposes here, this seems to me to be a fairly uncontroversial claim, although there are those who would (perhaps reasonably) object. I will not here offer any arguments for or against the various theories of perception, or consider the possibility that senses can be deceptive, which, of course, they can be. My point is that we can, at the very least, take it as a reasonably defensible claim that the sorts of experiences my body has in the world make me aware that it is mine in some important sense, and that there is at least some reason to rely on this perception. This argument, of course, gets a bit more complex if we include accounts of those who may not have access to all (or many) of their senses, or whose bodies are partially or fully paralyzed, amputated, or no longer sensitive to external stimuli. I will address this latter concern about how a lack of (or a change in) access to one's body and how it responds to its environment impacts one's identity later in the dissertation when I discuss the relationship between identity and deep illness.

the environment with which this self interacts.[129] Simply, from the data that my body provides, I begin to build a story of who I am and how I fit into the world.

In the second case, I am viewed by the outside world as a body with long, dark hair, or in a bright dress, or one who is short, tall, fat, thin, with blue eyes, with brown eyes. Or sometimes, more significantly, one who is brown, black, white. Male or female or neither or both. A body that can walk or cannot. A body that is relatively intact – or not. That is, I am perceived through my body first – before anything else happens, I am seen, felt, heard as a physical presence. And these stories of my body – about how it is perceived by the outside world – enter, and become, a part of my identity. I begin to see myself as short, tall, male, female not only descriptively, but normatively, with all of the social, psychological, and moral baggage that these physical labels impose. That is, I am shaped by this seeing, feeling, hearing, touching. The result of this "shaping" is that the portrait, the story that emerges, is of a body that is mine – uniquely mine. And at the same time, out of this knowledge of a body whose presence and effects are unavoidable, its story becomes my story as not only an entity that is separate from other entities, but as one to whom all kinds of normative judgments, rules, rights, and affections (or a lack thereof) are attached as a result of being in this particular body and not another. The idea that there are such things as de-personalized bodies– that there are vessel-like "bodies in general" (or, on Parfit's view, vessel-like brains) – that for reasons of their fungibility they do not really matter in a view of identity, seems rather puzzling.

But my body also expresses my continued sense of self through time – and, it seems to me, necessarily so. Indeed, it is unclear how I would be able to claim any sort of a

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[129] *See* Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

continuous identity without the bodily perspective from which this identity is articulated and expressed: the fact that I felt pain yesterday when placing my hand on a hot stove, and that today, recalling yesterday's pain, I stopped myself from so doing, suggests to me a kind of a coherence of experiences (and of my interpretation of those experiences) that is made possible through the body. I am not at all certain how, and according to what kind of logic, Parfit's "experience bundles," unanchored in the physical reality of bodies, become "bundled," and move through time thus connected (even if for a little while). In fact, it is unclear how Parfit's disconnection of experiences and the bodies that have them makes sense, given certain empirical findings about the relationship between muscle and neuron development, brain pathways, and the retention of psychological characteristics like memories, knowledge of how to perform certain tasks through time, and so on.[130] The bodily perspective, therefore, seems essential in even raising the question of identity, for in asking the question of "who I am," which I take to be what we do when we wonder about our identities as individuals, I already presuppose

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[130] "There is also good reason to think that Parfit's thought experiments mistake the implications of bodily continuity for identity on another front. Dispositional models of the mind presuppose an important interplay between the body's forms of sensibility – for example, things like the distribution of development across muscle groups in various limbs, depth and acuity of vision and hearing, skin integrity and peripheral nervous function, etc. – and the neural networks that correspond to perceptions received via those habitually formed sensory structures. Because of the integrated nature of human intelligence, things like brain transplants start to look incompatible with the survival of memories and capacities and their corresponding practical intelligence. For example, its arguable whether a bricklayer's brain in a ballet dancer's body would result in the retention of capacities for simple sensory-motor functions such as running or dressing, let alone either bricklaying or ballet dancing since the sensory pathways through which perceptions are entrained in order to activate neural nets would provide sensory-motor 'data' for which there may not even be pathways...."

Atkins 348.

See also Dreyfus, Hubert and Stuart, "Making a Mind Versus Modelling the Brain: Artificial Intelligence Back at a Branchpoint," *The Artificial Intelligence Debate*, ed. S. R. Graubard (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988).

> my embodiment, and my answer – the considered self-understanding that I arrive at – can transform my lived body, my sense of who I am. If I didn't already enjoy this integrated kind of bodily continuity, the pain of losing a sense of my body as my own could never arise, as it does for people who have suffered torture and violence.[131]

ii. Bodily Disintegration As Disintegration of Identity

Here, I introduce the example of torture and violence in order to address the notion of bodily disintegration. In this dissertation, I address not only the meaning and development of personal identity, but also its consequences for those who are at the greatest risk of its disintegration or loss: the deeply ill. My definition of "deep illness" is borrowed from Arthur W. Frank's work, in which he described "illness that you believe will change forever who you are and how you understand the world you live in."[132] An individual who is deeply ill is not suffering a temporary setback or an illness that, while unpleasant and inconvenient, is also transitory. Instead, a deeply ill person is faced with permanent, life-changing, remitting-recurring conditions like cancer, diabetes, schizophrenia (although I do not address mental illness as such due to its obvious and deeply problematic implications for identity that I will take up at a later time), partial or full paralysis or amputation (although, again, I do not address the very important debate that distinguishes illness from disability),

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[131] Atkins 339.

[132] Arthur W. Frank, "Stories and Healing: Observations on the Progress of My Thoughts," *LitSite Alaska*, 2006, 10 July 2007 <http://litsite.alaska.edu/healing/frank.html#bio>.

See also Frank, Arthur W., "Just Listening: Narrative and Deep Illness," *Families, Systems & Health* 16.3 (1998): 197–212; Frank, Arthur W., *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997); and Frank, Arthur W., *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness* (New York: Mariner Books, 2002).

HIV/AIDS, ALS, MS, all sorts of debilitating arthritis and musculoskeletal diseases, and so on. Whatever their specific difference, most of these conditions are life-threatening, permanent (or the results of such conditions, as in the case of amputation), and, at least at this point in the development of medical science, incurable. And in many cases, the process of diagnosis, treatment, and enduring these conditions is, at least at some point in the process, somewhat akin to the invasive violence that victims of torture and other forms of brutality have endured. Such violence – especially, for my purposes here, such violence on the body – dramatically disrupts one's identity. I suggest that it is here, when the body speaks most emphatically, that disembodied views of identity, such as Parfit's, fail.

By way of argument, I offer two examples – one borrowed from Susan J. Brison's excellent and illuminating article "Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity,"[133] and another from my own experience with a patient on an oncology ward in a midwestern hospital.[134]

Case one: In her essay, Brison argues that traumas has the potential to "undo the self," where by a "traumatic event" she means an event where "a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening."[135] Although her focus is on the sorts of traumas human beings inflict on each other – concentration camps, torture, rape, and so on – the effect, it seems to me, is that of a loss, or severe damage, to one's identity, whereby one is at the same time physically, and thus psychologically, obliterated. And in the maelstrom of this obliteration, one has a choice: accept the fact of the event, or dissociate.

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[133] *See* Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

[134] In this story, the facts are loosely based on several interviews with a real patient on the oncology ward in a midwestern hospital. Needless to say, all identities, conditions, and statements have been altered and disguised to protect the patients, their families, and the medical staff.

[135] Susan J. Brison, "Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity," *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers and Alison Jaggar (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001) 13.

Yet in both cases, the connection to one's brutalized body produce remarkably similar effects on one's identity. If one accepts the reality of what has taken place, as Brison herself had done after being raped, beaten and left to die, then one feels, and continues to feel "more tied to (one's) body than before, or, at any rate, more vulnerable to self-annihilation because of (one's) body."[136] If one dissociates, as some survivors of the Holocaust have done, then one "may feel that an essential part of (oneself) was untouched by the trauma," but even then, "the physical intrusions of visceral traumatic memories" seem unavoidable.[137] Importantly, Brison remarks that

> these responses to trauma – whether dissociation from one's body or separation from the self that one was either before of during the trauma – have in common the attempt to distance one's (real) self from the bodily self that is being degraded....But such an attempt is never wholly successful, and the survivor's bodily sense of self is permanently altered by an encounter with death that leaves one feeling "marked" for life. The intense awareness of embodiment experienced by trauma survivors...is more akin to the pain of Kafka's (1948) "harrow," cutting the condemned man's "sentence" deeper and deeper into his body until it destroys him....Not only are one's memories of an earlier life lost, along with the ability to envision a future, but one's basic cognitive and emotional capacities are gone, or radically altered, as well.[138]

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[136] Brison 20.

[137] Brison 20.

[138] Brison 20-21.

Case two: Ms. B. is bedridden and suffering from the lethal combination of leukemia, other forms of cancer, and a number of conditions that make it difficult, if not impossible, to treat one without aggravating the others. In the uncertain half-light of a late Midwestern afternoon, in the greenish, "semi-private" room of the hospital's oncology ward, I am trying to scribble down bits and pieces of Ms. B.'s life that come tumbling out of her haphazardly, disjointedly, like something she no longer recognizes as her own.

But it was not always like this. An imposing African-American woman in her late sixties, Ms. B. has been the primary breadwinner in her household of four children ever since her husband walked out when the oldest was eight. She has held a number of jobs over the years, but has always prided herself on not requiring "handouts," and in fact has at times taken in several children of distant relatives who could no longer care for them. She managed, over the years, to go from the sort of job that required a uniform and nametag to an office with her name on the door for which tailored suits were the more appropriate attire.

But then Ms. B. fell ill – seriously ill. With her children all grown up, she tried to manage on her own, until she could no longer do so. Eventually, she found herself at the local hospital, where she found out that her insurance would only cover a part of her treatment, and that generally speaking, her prognosis was poor. And something happened: the usually independent, confident, and assertive (according to those who knew her before) Ms. B., who had successfully raised not only her own but other people's children, and whose ire was dreaded both at home and at work, became somebody else. When I met her, first in the earlier part of her treatment, she was shy, frightened, extremely soft-spoken, and cooperative to a fault. She was also quite concerned that she do exactly what the doctor has told her – and do it "right." If this meant following the sometimes confusing directions of a

number of doctors, well, then she tried to do the best she can. After all, they knew best – they were the experts. She explained several times that she considered it "rude" and "disrespectful" to ask the doctors (or even the nurses) their names and what exactly they were doing – there were just so many of them it was hard to keep track. She never corrected the older, important-looking doctor who came in every other day and persisted in calling her "Barbara." Barbara was not even Ms. B's first name.

And in the months and weeks before she died, although clinically of sound mind, her behavior was marked by her reluctance to engage in even the sorts of tasks that she still could do. It was as if her every movement was marked by a new suspicion and distrust of her body, of her decision-making ability, and a growing understanding, and terror, of her fragility.

iii. The Embodied Identity

Before continuing, I want to forestall a potential objection. Why, the objection might go, treat these two cases as examples of identity destruction? Is this not just a way to use the traumatization of the body in order to essentialize one particular instantiation of a person's identity, mistakenly treating bodily annihilation as the destruction of identity in toto? Why not simply take the Parfitian route and just admit to the fact of successive selves, some of which might indeed be destroyed along with a given body?

The answer, I think, lies in Samuel Beckett's infamous summation of the human condition: "I can't go on, I must go on."[139] Specifically, the response is grounded in the fact that, whether one is a survivor of trauma or is permanently, and deeply, ill, unless one does

[139] Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press Black Cat, 1965) 414.

not "go on" – either through suicide or through the kind of personal disintegration that perhaps can best be understood as mental illness – one indeed does "go on," both because one must continue living in a world that requires a certain amount of identity integration, and also because we, as human beings, tend toward a certain level of integration as well. The way in which we proceed may differ: we might dissociate, and thus push away from the identities that we view as irredeemably damaged as a result of our tortured bodies, or we might proceed to pick up the pieces of what is left of our past selves, and try and reconstruct something that is part pre-trauma self and part post-trauma: Brison chose to pick up the pieces, as did Ms. B., albeit Brison succeeded in her process of self-reconstruction while Ms. B. wholly became her illness, with her bodily trauma completely overriding her pre-illness self. The point, however, is that we cannot simply accede to Parfit's view of disembodied, successive selves because (1) as I have already argued, our bodies have a direct and immediate effect on our identities, and (2) even when our identities are threatened or possibly destroyed as a result of bodily annihilation, we do not – we cannot – move forward unscathed by the "self" that has suffered or is suffering. Even if we dissociate from our past identities, which I suspect might be the closest counterpart to Parfit's successive selves, we are nevertheless doing so because of these damaged past identities – we are reacting to them, even if away from them. Or, like Charlotte Delbo, a Holocaust survivor, we "split," living with an awareness of our past self, but "next to it," as if next to a stranger in a parallel universe, whose presence we know, but whose reality we choose not to acknowledge.[140]

All of this suggests that Parfit's criteria for psychological continuity simply do not hold: given that, on his view, the continuation of any given self through time is dependent on the continuation of its desires and belief structures, he cannot account for the fact that

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[140] Brison 19.

regardless of how we address our predicament, and largely due to our embodiment, we never simply transform into unrelated successive selves. Moreover, even if we seem to completely dissociate from our past self (and thus ostensibly no longer have any psychological continuity with it), we are still connected to it, even if reactively. Thus, unless we are in a fugue state, we are, like Delbo, aware of the presence of our past identity, and this awareness cannot but affect the construction of our present one. I take this to mean that Parfit is mistaken about both how identities form and how they are destroyed (with and through the body). Similarly, I am puzzled by his apparent argument for an identity that, even if tenuously linked for a while to its predecessors, might, after certain psychological changes, not be connected to them at all.

Most importantly, Parfit does not seem to want to acknowledge that this predicament of being connected to the whole of our lives, no matter how difficult or traumatic, deeply matters to us as human beings – that we care about a continuing sense of our identities as they move through time for a very good reason: Our lives are not simply neutral collections of actions, thoughts, and events, or, as Parfit puts it, "the existence of our brains and bodies, and the doing of our deeds, and the thinking of our thoughts, and the occurrence of certain other physical and mental events."[141] The phenomenon of being human and possessing an identity necessarily includes the unique and individuating physical and psychological experiences that separate us from mere objects and imbue our existence not just with meaning, but with personal meaning. In other words, we are, in the course of weaving together our identities, meaning-makers, and not merely bundles of psychological and physical activity that now and then just happen to coincide in space and time. In the end, it seems that just as there are no supersensible entities of the kind Parfit took

[141] Parfit 216.

"identities" to be, there are also no impersonal selves and interchangeable bodies that are inessential for identity formation. Indeed, arguing for either possibility seems to be an odd misconception of what it might mean to lead a human life. And even if we take seriously Parfit's (eventual) normative goal of supporting utilitarianism as a possible way to care about future selves, his reductionist view of identities and bodies does not seem to add up to a viable alternative to the positions that he seems too ready to reject.[142]

b. The Objection from Agency: Individuated Identities Matter Because Agency Matters

It appears that I am deliberately ignoring Parfit's observation that "we are not series of events....we are not thoughts and actions, but thinkers and agents." But what Parfit gives with one hand, he takes back with the other. He goes on to say, "but this is true only because we describe our lives by ascribing thoughts and actions to people...We could give a complete description of our lives that was impersonal: that did not claim that persons

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[142] Judith Jarvis Thomson, in "People and their Bodies" in *Reading Parfit*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), argues that Parfit's rejection of the physical body's role in assessing personal identity (and then of the importance of personal identity itself) is a serious error. Specifically, she challenges his view that the indeterminacy regarding the role of the body in the definition of identity that is the result of his brain transplantation and other thought experiments:

> the thought that there cannot be either kind of indeterminacy is intimately connected with the thought that a person must really be a mental substance – a mental monad in fact. For if there cannot be either kind of indeterminacy, then doesn't that mean that people have to be indivisible? (If people have parts, as bodies do, then indeterminacy in respect of them would be possible).

See Judith Jarvis Thomson, "People and their Bodies," *Reading Parfit*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 225.

Also, in *Reading Parfit*, Simon Blackburn argues in his essay "Has Kant Refuted Parfit?" that Parfit misinterprets what is meant by "I", and John McDowell's essay, "Reductionism and the First Person," argues that "reductionism is wrong, not because personal identity is a further fact, but because there is no conceptually simpler substratum for personal identity to be further to."

Dancy 180, 245.

exist."[143] In this section, I further my argument against Parfit by focusing on agency – specifically, agency as proposed by Christine Korsgaard and Harry Frankfurt. However, since the agency-based approach to identity is not central to my claims in this chapter other than as a lens through which to view Parfit's argument, I will only briefly sketch the outlines of what it is and why it matters. I return to the agency-based approach in the last chapter (Chapter VI) of the dissertation, when I consider several methods of determining the criteria of what constitutes the sort of illness narrative that is good in a specifically moral sense. I now turn to a critique of Parfit from the point of view of (human) agency.

In order to place Korsgaard's (and Frankfurt's, to a large extent) criticism in context, we might remind ourselves of the Kantian perspective from which Korsgaard addresses Parfit's claims. Roughly, Kant held that, as rational persons, we can regard ourselves either from (1) a theoretical standpoint, where I am an experiencing entity which exists in various states through time, and whose behaviors, determined by natural phenomena, can be understood, explained, and predicted), or from (2) a practical standpoint, where I take myself to be an entity that acts freely, and that has the potential to deliberate, choose, and act. From the theoretical standpoint, we are viewed as somewhat passive experiencing objects of theoretical study, and from the practical standpoint, we view ourselves as active agents who both author, and are responsible for, our own actions.[144] While Parfit's claims are rooted in the theoretical standpoint, if we assume the practical standpoint, Korsgaard tells us, we will see that persons have a kind of a unity over time. And since we are agents, we have to adopt

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[143] Parfit 341.

[144] David W. Shoemaker, "Theoretical Persons and Practical Agents," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25.4 (1996): 318.

Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18.2 (1989): 119-120.

the practical standpoint. Indeed, we might even grant Parfit's metaphysical claims (which are grounded in the theoretical standpoint) while still taking persons to be unified in a significant way, practically speaking. Therefore, Parfit's ethical conclusions fail to follow from his metaphysics. But we neither have to prove his metaphysics wrong, nor to force his argument to address identity from a practical standpoint in order to propose a counterargument to his reductionism about identity. Indeed, Parfit might be making an argument about something, but it is not about identity, or even about persons (in any recognizable sense of the term).[145]

Specifically, Korsgaard argues that what Parfit refers to as the unity of consciousness or the unity of identity is simply the unity of agency, and that in asking the consciousness question, Parfit is simply missing the point.[146] What we cannot ignore, Korsgaard tells us, is that we have to view ourselves from the practical standpoint, especially when considering ourselves as authors of our own actions. In other words, we must always regard ourselves as necessarily agents.[147] Parfit, however, takes agency as merely another experience, rather than as the condition of possibility for experience. This rejection of the significance of personal identity, of course, supports his utilitarian claims that, in the absence of metaphysical commitments to an identity, we have an ethical commitment to care equally for the future selves of "others" as well as for what we take to be our own "selves." But what this metaphysical approach misses is the role of our practical identity as agents that unifies us both in time and through time.

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[145] Korsgaard 101-132.

[146] Korsgaard 109.

[147] Korsgaard 111.

We can see, therefore, the direction of Korsgaard's response to Parfit quite clearly: First, she denies that metaphysics are the key to questions about personal identity, and second, she inserts the relationship between personal identity and normativity back into identity-talk. Being fundamentally grounded in the fact of having to make deliberative choices, we are driven to identify with a unifying principle that would direct the reasons for which we make these choices, thereby uniting concerns about identity with those about normativity.[148]

However, as Korsgaard herself notes, she also needs to offer is an account of personal identity as story of a unity moving through time.[149] She begins by considering the possibility that our bodies might be viewed as a series of agents, unified at any given moment, but consisting of a number of such unities over a period of time. And yet this account is not tenable. First, most things that we do in life – and indeed, most things that are worth doing in life – take time. Not only that, but some things that we do only make sense in the context of time. Therefore, there has to be some sort of a unity that moves someone from laying one brick to the other while, for instance, building a wall. Or writing a song. Or pursing better health. Or seeking a degree, and so on. And what is more, our individual projects are themselves interconnected – they are a part of a life plan that we might take ourselves to be pursuing: I am building a home, say, because later, I intend to raise a family there, retire there, and so on. Interestingly, Korsgaard notes that although it is normally thought that we live one continuous life due to being a single, unified person, the truth just the reverse: It seems that I have a unified identity precisely because I have but a

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[148] Korsgaard 111.

See also David W. Shoemaker, "Theoretical Persons and Practical Agents," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 25.4 (1996): 318-332

[149] Korsgaard 114.

single life to live – and because I tend to make long-term plans, and attempt to carry them out. And "the unit of action" in so doing is a human body.[150]

It is both helpful to her argument and, it seems to me, a generally fruitful move in itself that Korsgaard focuses on embodiment as one of the arguments against Parfit. It helps her because it serves as a response to what Korsgaard takes to be Parfit's possible claim about her views on identity and normativity: if all one needs to argue for a unity of agency that brings together the notions of identity and normativity is the fact that we need to, and do, make plans and carry them out, then personal identity is neither important nor of any "deep" significance. After all, if the reason we require the notion of personal identity is to coordinate and carry out the plans that we make in simply living our lives, then it does not seem so necessary for the unitary "us" to actually possess anything like a personal identity through time. Indeed, as Korsgaard takes Parfit to be suggesting, we might instead act in groups, whereby we proceed as a corporation or a nation would – communally, sharing a "territory," with all the power of a legal or fictional identity, but without the unifying singular one.[151]

But here is where Korsgaard reintroduces the notion of embodiment and thus dispenses with Parfit's potential objections. A state or a nation, she notes, is not merely a group of individuals sharing a plot of land; a state can be said to occur when "citizens have constituted themselves into a single agent...They have...adopted a way of resolving conflicts, making decisions, interacting with other states, and planning together for an

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[150] Korsgaard 111-114.

[151] Korsgaard 111-114.

See also Shoemaker 331.

ongoing future."[152] They, in other words, make a choice, through their legislative bodies, to deliberate, to speak, and then to act as a unitary whole. In short, they choose an identity – in this case, a national identity. Similarly, "when a group of psychological functions occupy the same human body, they have an even more imperative need to become a unified person. This is why the human body must be conceived as a unified agent...It is the basic kind of agent."[153] This focus on agency, Korsgaard suggests, is a much more useful way to address personal identity that Parfit's emphasis on fleeting experience. The result is that we are justified in viewing personal identity as something practical, unified and deliberative – and thus in the realm of the moral. And none of this requires Parfit's reductivist metaphysical theorizing.

If Korsgaard's critique of Parfit might be viewed as a defense of why personal identity, both in particular time and through time, is normatively important, then Harry Frankfurt's seminal paper, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (as well as his equally influential *The Importance of What We Care About*) redefines personal identity in terms of an identification with certain core desires, and personhood in terms of the capacity to reflect on one's "first-order" desires, and to formulate one's will in response to those reflections. This move challenges, albeit indirectly, both Dennett's dismissal of moral personhood as well as Parfit's reductivist treatment of personal identity. According to Frankfurt, it is not merely important to identify with one's "true" desires, and thus have a unified, coherent identity – it is vital to respond to these desires as a person.

In the first few lines of "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Frankfurt expresses his dissatisfaction with how the concept of personhood has been treated

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[152] Korsgaard 114.

[153] Korsgaard 115.

by philosophers. It is not that he finds something objectionable in the specifics of any particular treatment of personhood – he objects to the whole enterprise that, on his view, does little to meaningfully distinguish human beings from other entities, and suggests that such careless use of language does actual "harm" to the otherwise meaningful pursuit of what it might mean to be a "person."[154] What rightfully distinguishes persons is not their biology, Frankfurt proposes, but the capacity to care about the structure of their will.[155]

Specifically, Frankfurt offers the following account. Being free, we have often been told, means doing what one wants to do. But an agent who acts freely is not necessarily the same agent whose will is free – freedom of action and freedom of the will are not the same. Frankfurt suggests that this both comports with our intuitions that we are unique (with unique identities), and makes the freedom of the will, the crucial element of personhood, not only possible, but infinitely worth pursuing. For Frankfurt, "persons" are not merely "actors" or "wantons" who are free to act on their desires, but agents whose wills are normatively guided, and who are, as a result, free.[156]

The claim here is very powerful, and has everything to do with Frankfurt's earlier assertion that there is a deep, necessary connection between human freedom and human will. As persons, we are creatures to whom the contents of our will matter, for we are capable of experiencing the terrible pain of the unwilling addict when our will fails us. At the same time, we are potentially able to be free to have the will that we want to have – our freedom is such that, through reflective self-evaluation, we are able to endorse those desires that we want to be effective in defining our lives, in defining who we are. This suggests that

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[154] Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68.1 (1971): 5-6.

[155] Frankfurt 6.

[156] Frankfurt 14-16.

the person actually has something at stake in identifying with and withdrawing from certain desires, for only she is able to experience both the agony of a will that is battling forces external to it, as well as the triumph of a will that wins that struggle. Such an action-centered view tends to undermine Parfit's experience-bundles, and asserts that there is indeed a "further fact" about our identities: it is an inescapable fact of life that we must make choices, and, in the end, we must act.[157] This reality is quite different from the passive process of having experiences that is at the core of Parfit's psychological continuity thesis. Indeed, it seems that our actions, if they are to be the actions of agents, must be grounded in the purposeful activity of meaning-making through which our identities – the representations of who we are to ourselves and to the world – are created. What this suggests, in turn, is that my identity – the question of who I am – is at least in large part my own project. It is something which I experience, but it is also something that I create. This leads me to conclude that impersonal approaches to identity, such as Parfit's, miss the fundamental importance of moral authorship[158], or ownership, of our lives.

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[157] *See* Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

I will argue later that Korsgaard's agent-centered critique responds quite powerfully to Parfit's argument for an agent-less (and thus identity-less) view of persons. Moreover, in her essay "Self-interest and Interest in Selves," *Ethics*, 96 (July 1986), Susan Wolf argues that metaphysical claims, such as those of Parfit, do not in any way do away with our robust interest in selves. I would also suggest that this interest in selves necessarily includes interest in the bodies which are instrumental in making us the persons that we take ourselves to be. And it seems to me that unless we are completely ignorant (or irredeemably wrong) as to the truth of the matter regarding our selves and our identities – that is, unless claims such as Parfit's get it right – the strength of that interest alone speaks quite clearly in support of my earlier claim that our physicality is an integral part of our identity.

[158] Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," 123.

i. The Objection from Agency (Some Initial Worries About Unitary Identity)

But the concern with agential authorship and control can present us with a number of difficulties. Although in the dissertation I offer a more complete treatment of this issue, here, I only gesture toward several potential problems that are indicative of why the Korsgaard-Frankfurt position on identity, although an improvement on Parfit's, is problematic. I begin this section by proposing that both Korsgaard and Frankfurt are after something that marks them as philosophical cousins (if indeed not siblings). This similarity, I believe, will help me to address their views in a way that will later be helpful in drawing the necessary distinctions between what identity looks like on their view, and the sort of picture that I will propose.

So, what is it that they share? The short answer is that the sort of view of personhood and personal identity they espouse is of the agential type, championing volitional unity and the sort of willful self-control that distinguishes mere existence from living one's life as one (morally) ought. For them, to be a truly human self – to possess a truly human identity– is not merely a description, but an achievement. Being a person and having an identity is for both of them a nonarbitrary, deliberate process of acting based on rational, thought-through choices, and if we fail to unify ourselves as agents, we are indeed threatened with a very real, very dangerous sort of personal disintegration.[159] As Korsgaard reminds us, "You must have a sense of yourself as a unified chooser with reasons in order to act," and this unity must, in order for us to remain coherent agents, exist at any given point

[159] Schechtman, Marya, "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," *Personal Identity*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 1-24.

as well as stretch over time.[160] Similarly, as Frankfurt notes, "There is, I believe, a quite primitive human need to establish and to maintain volitional unity. Any threat to that unity – that is, any threat to the cohesion of the self – tends to alarm a person, and to mobilize him for an attempt at 'self-preservation.'"[161] By "self-preservation," Frankfurt here means not merely "the sense of sustaining...the life of the organism but the persistence of the self."[162] In fact,

> For someone who is unlikely to have any stable preferences or goals...the benefits of freedom are, at the very least, severely diminished. The opportunity to act in accordance with his own inclinations is a doubtful asset for an individual whose will is so divided that he is moved both to decide for a certain alternative and to decide against it. Neither of the alternatives can satisfy him, since each entails the frustration of the other. The fact that he is free to choose between them is likely only to make this anguish more poignant and more intense."[163]

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[160] Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 15.

See also Christine Korsgaard, *Locke Lectures*, "Self-Constitution: Action, Identity and Integrity," May-June 2002, Oxford University, 10 July 2007 <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~korsgaar/Korsgaard.LL1.pdf>.

[161] Harry Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 139.

See also Schechtman, Marya, "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," *Personal Identity*, ed. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 1-24.

[162] Harry Frankfurt, "On the Usefulness of Final Ends," 89.

See also Schechtman, Marya, "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," 1-24.

[163] Harry Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," 102.

See also Schechtman, Marya, "Experience, Agency, and Personal Identity," 1-24.

Unity, therefore, is essential of we are to live our lives at all. Likewise, Korsgaard adds that this need to regard ourselves as unified, reasoning agents suggests that we must identify with these reasons, for they will "automatically carry us into the future....implementing something like a particular plan of life, you need to identify with your future in order to be what you are even now."[164] What unifies us over time is the fact of our living our lives in a particular time and place – right now. And it is not a matter of convoluted metaphysics or puzzling ontology. However, I am troubled by several implications of this emphasis on the unity of agency. My first worry is centered around the relationship between unity and the passage of time, and my second concern addresses the Frankfurt-Korsgaard (henceforth KF) conflation of the desire to continue to exist at all and the desire to continue to exist in a particular way.[165] Specifically, I believe that if we intend to theorize about personal identity in an way that is relevant to human beings living in time, we ought to worry about the central component of what I call the KF thesis: that the most important factor in one's status as a moral agent in time and through time – and thus the most important component of an identity that such an agent ought to possess – is a unitary will that is reflectively regulated. I begin with the KF claims about unity and time.

If the unity of agency is nothing short of a necessity for the very existence of our lives as human beings, then this unity ought to hold not merely in the short term, but over the entire span of our lives. Although this is not necessarily indisputable, it is, at least on its face, defensible. After all, if I have a reason to care about who I am and what I do today, I

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[164] Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18.2 (1989): 113-114.

[165] Schechtman 18.

seem to have a reason to care about who I am and what I do next week, next year, and so on. This possibility also serves as a potential source of worry for claims such as Korsgaard's or Frankfurt's.

Why this is the case becomes clearer if we recall Korsgaard's claim that the unity of agency is essential for being able to perform any sort of action, such as deciding to go to the library instead of to the theater, to eat an apple rather than a piece of cake, and so on. And even though Frankfurt differs with Korsgaard on a number of details regarding how we talk about our commitments as agents, he agrees with her in that these commitments must necessarily be stable for us to lead a life that is both consequential and coherent. What becomes somewhat confused – or, perhaps more precisely, fused – is whether integration and unity are sufficient to have a life or whether they are required to have a (morally) meaningful life. Thus the KF claim that an account of identity (persisting through time and at a given time) must also be an account of the criteria for moral agency (persisting through time and at a given time) seems to suggest that the two issues have themselves become hopelessly intertwined and unified.[166]

This is precisely the problem. After all, if it is the same thing for me to persist – that is, to continue having an identity – as to persist well (say, to remain an agent, as the KF thesis would suggest) then it would seem that it would be impossible for me, as an agent with a unitary (moral) identity, to live a life that is meaningless, without direction, or only intermittently meaningful or directed.[167] As a corollary, it would seem that as a non-agent, my chances for a meaningful life are not good at all. In fact, on KF's account, it would be impossible for me to lead a human life of any kind if it had no moral, unifying compass – or

[166] Schechtman 12-18.

at least so it would seem. For instance, what if I, for some reason (medical, psychological, or for no reason at all) became unable to focus my energies and desires? What if I could never come to a stable conclusion about my actions and instead acted on instinct, or reactively, or irrationally – would this mean that my life not only as an agent, but as a person with a decipherable, coherent identity, is over?

c. The Objection from Narrative (Individuated Identities as Narrated Identities)

This question brings me to the final section of this chapter, and one in which I begin to develop a positive picture of how we ought to construe identity as the identity of individuals, as well as the significance of this approach. I begin, following Marya Schechtman, by offering an answer. I then turn to a third, narrative-based criticism of Parfit, which at the same time serves as the foundation of my own views, which I will develop in later chapters. My goal here is to argue that (1) the KF thesis's requirements of a unitary will do not present a threat to identity formation, and that (2) a narrative approach to identity formation and maintenance is a viable alternative not only to the KF thesis, but to Parfit's reductionism. I conclude by suggesting several ways in which the particular narrative approach I address here (Schechtman's) ought to be revised, and why.

In addressing the worry about identity in the face of a failure of agential unity, Schechtman begins by reminding us of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where Camus asks the one question that he takes to be worth asking[168]:

[168] Schechtman 17-19.

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.[169]

Regardless of whether we take Camus's point to be as fundamental as he suggests (or whether we agree with him at all) we nevertheless are confronted by the possibility that his claim presents a direct challenge to the KF unified identity thesis. But not for the obvious reasons.

Schechtman suggests that Camus might at first be viewed as challenging the KF position on the grounds that "if we are worried about having to live in the future despite the fact that life has no overarching significance, it would seem that no such significance is required to continue living a life."[170] But she (correctly, in my opinion), takes this to be the wrong concern, born of a misunderstanding of the KF position. The KF position faces a challenge from Camus for quite a different reason. Camus is not, after all, suggesting that without any apparent overarching meaning – or unity or direction – one ought to simply end one's suffering for good. He is, however, claiming that life does not require such unity or meaning.[171] Life goes on despite it, and is, in fact, better for it. It is in this world, free from ready-made superstructures of meaning, unity, and rationality that human beings can

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[169] Albert Camus, "Absurdity and Suicide," *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1991) 3.

[170] Schechtman 19.

[171] Schechtman 20.

construct their own identities – and their own lives – in ways that are unique to them.[172] Indeed, Camus has famously noted that if we are looking for ways to assure ourselves of concrete meaning in our lives, we deeply misunderstand the enterprise of living, for "integrity has no need of rules."[173]

We can see an interesting relationship develop here between the KF thesis and Camus's existentialist views – interesting not only because of the contrasts, but also because of the opportunity to see what is at the heart of Korsgaard's and Frankfurt's claims. Camus addresses the seeming meaninglessness of existence by dismissing the pieties of a transcendent purpose, form and structure. But, interestingly enough, the KF thesis does something quite similar, albeit in a different way: the sorts of reasons that we live by, so the thesis (roughly) goes, are not transcendental, or somehow "outside" of us, or "given" to us by someone else – we provide our own reasons and values not just for living, but for living in a particular way.[174] This is the only way to be an agent or indeed to be a person. We have not only to know ourselves, but to trust that knowledge enough to let it guide our actions in what can be viewed as self-authorship.[175] Thus, in the most general of ways, perhaps Camus would indeed grant the formal trajectory of the KF thesis. However, what he would not endorse is the substance of its argument. And while I am defending neither the general existentialist concept of identity, nor Camus's particular conceptualization of it, this potential objection of Camus brings me to what I take to be a serious worry about the KF thesis.

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[172] Schechtman 20.
[173] Camus 66.

[174] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 160-164.

See also Schechtman 20.

[175] Schechtman 20.

The worry is centered around the KF thesis's emphasis on doing over being. That is, Camus rejects meaning-making as a project, and instead values the fact of our capacity to have experiences. Our unifying, self-authoring principles abandoned, we, as human beings, can develop and maintain our identities by simply being – by persisting through time. Yet the KF thesis insists that the key to our existence as persons lies precisely in taking the reasons that we author as agents seriously – seriously enough, in fact, that ignoring them leads to a possible disintegration of the self, an annihilation of any meaningful identity.[176] And here we notice something quite significant: while the KF position does not discount the value of experience altogether, it does appear to miss something fundamental about human beings – specifically, that we care about moving through time as an experiencing subject who perhaps wants to engage in meaning-making, but who also, in Schechtman's words,

> just plain wants to be there in the future, with or without purpose. Two more months, even if there are no loose ends to tie up or projects to complete, are two more months. This does not mean that pain and depression cannot make the negative value of continuation so great that it is no longer deemed worthwhile – this is when we see suicide as an understandable response. But the significance of being there, just to be there, just to keep having experiences, just to have a life and not necessarily a meaningful life.[177]

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[176] Schechtman 20.

[177] Schechtman 21.

Here, it is important to note what I do not mean by this: I do not mean that purposeful identity-creation and identity-maintenance are unimportant. I do, however, disagree with the suggestion that, in considering the nature and purpose of our identities, we ought only, and primarily, be concerned with ourselves as unified agents – as entities who are defined solely by the fact that they are unified. As on point as Korsgaard's and Frankfurt's arguments might be against Parfit's reductionism, when viewed against the background of other concerns that we might have about how to live in the world as subjects of experience, they are not sufficient. And it seems to me that any consideration of identity (at any given time, but especially through time), should include some deliberation about what happens to us as well as what we might do, plan, or will. However, while the KF thesis does allow, and from an agential perspective even encourages, the idea that identities set up normative expectations, its concerns about identity seem to lie solely with what I, as an agent, do rather than what others may do or must not do to me. In other words, what is missing from the KF account is the third-person use of identities as markers for moral status, treatment, and agential efficacy. I take up this issue more fully in the next chapter.

For now, the following question remains: Does this mean that Parfit was indeed correct in his assessment of our survival through time? That is, was he correct in denying any importance, or indeed, coherence, to our worries about any kind of a unity of consciousness, which, in turn, gave rise to such illusory ideas as personal identity or personhood? [178]

The answer to this is, of course, an emphatic no – for two reasons. First, if we grant even the slightest credence to the KF thesis, for all of its flaws, it quite possibly provides us with "something more like our naïve conception of psychological continuation...our

[178] Schechtman 21.

conception of ourselves as unified agents can have a profound impact on the quality of our conscious experience, and on our experience of ourselves as persisting subjects as well as agents."[179] At minimum, this calls Parfit's reductionism about identity into question.

The second reason brings me to my second point – that Parfit's irrealism about identity can be successfully challenged by a narrative approach to identity. I suggest that it is this narrative turn that can both powerfully question Parfit's presuppositions about what identities are and what they do, as well as more fully address the especially difficult question that Parfit cannot handle – how to theorize the identities of the deeply ill. While I set aside the specific worry about the identities of the deeply ill (and why Parfit's view fails to satisfactorily speak to this issue) until the next chapter, I will here, again partially following Schechtman, begin to question Parfit's view of identity. I will conclude by offering an initial critique of Schechtman's approach, suggesting a complementary, but separate, perspective on a narrative treatment of identity.

The story goes something like this. As beings in the world, we are concerned about our future identities, both qualitatively and qualitatively. Most of the time, we want to make sure that we survive into the future, and that when we get there, we are reasonably recognizable to ourselves (and to others) as ourselves. The question then becomes what matters in our survival – what do we care about, and why.

In *The Constitution of Selves*,[180] Schechtman takes on this worry, distinguishing between two questions of personal identity: the Parfitian "reidentification question," which asks only

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[179] Schechtman 21.

For example, Schechtman reminds us that Korsgaard has claimed that the fact that we have reasons for action as agents "carries" us "into the future." Frankfurt has similarly argued for the importance of having ends and "stable commitments" in order to render our lives meaningful. In both cases, in planning what to do and thinking about future experiences, reactions, and so on, we "project ourselves" into the future as agents and subjects.

[180] Schechtman, Marya, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

whether an entity persists through time, and the "characterization question," which concerns what I call the identity of individuals, or, as Schechtman puts it, "the kind of identity that is at issue in an identity crisis" when we are most likely to ask "who am I" or "who will I be tomorrow?"[181] She argues that it is only by addressing the characterization question that we can motivate a reason for any future concern about the survival of our identities and ourselves.

The way in which Schechtman addresses the characterization question is through what she takes to be the four features of our existence: moral responsibility, self-interested concern, compensation, and survival. For all of us, these questions come in various shades of importance, marked by our personal preferences, interests, situations, contexts, abilities, and goals. She notes that "all of the characteristics that are part of a person's history are presumed to contribute to making up of her identity. Some, however, play a more central role than others and are more truly expressive of who she is."[182] For instance, for the sort of person who values being able to run, swim, play soccer, and otherwise be active and independent, a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis redefines "survival." While not precluding physical survival as such, MS limits the range of possible physical activity (and perhaps mental competence), as well as independence: although this individual may be able to feed his dog, make his breakfast, and even remain employed, he might no longer be able to

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[181] Schechtman 74.

[182] Schechtman 77.

See also Hilde Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 72-75.

I will not address these features in any detail here, but will do so in the next several chapters. I only note them in order to introduce Schechtman's characterization question, and to make clear her more nuanced, more contextualized approach to identity. These four elements, I believe, clarify what she means when she argues that in order to care about our survival, we have to care about specific elements of ourselves as surviving, and not merely about the formal sense of survival, in which some entity endures through space and time.

engage in the sorts of activities that provided him with the most personal meaning and sense of well being. And so when the MS patient asks "who am I?" he is asking three questions: "who was I?" "who am I now?" and "who will I be tomorrow (and in the foreseeable future)?" While the answer to the first question might be clearer, the second, and especially the third, are intimately connected to the valuation calculus of the patient himself: whether the MS patient survived as "himself," what his sense of responsibility for his life might be, what his concern for the future is, and what sort of compensation he envisions for putting up with his present pain are all matters of a web of "actions, experiences, and characteristics" that are uniquely his own.[183] And in weaving this web, the patient builds his new, postdiagnosis identity – and potentially begins to care about his survival.

The process of identity formation – what Schechtman calls the "narrative self-constitution view" – is a process of implicitly creating one's "identity by forming an autobiographical narrative–a story of (one's) life" 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."[184]

Through her narrative self-constitution view, Schechtman, it seems to me, accomplishes two things that are theoretically significant and practically illuminating: First, she achieves something that neither somatic theorists about identity, nor the KF thesis, nor

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[183] Schechtman 77.

See also Lindemann 74.

[184] Schechtman 93-94.

Schechtman places limitations on what kinds of narratives may constitute the process of identity formation. They must cohere with objective reality, they cannot be egregiously in error of publicly available facts and the evaluations of such facts, and they must be intelligible. I examine the potential problems that are inherent in these constraints, as well as some of the advantages of having such constraints, in the next chapter.

Schechtman 95-130.

Parfit could: in advancing a narrative approach to identity formation and maintenance, she unites the elements of embodiment, experience, and agency, and organizes them into individual-centered, yet theoretically constrained, criteria of identity formation. She does not exclude the bodily criterion in favor of concerns about agency, nor does she exclude any considerations of agency in favor of subjective experience – they are all a part of Schechtman's four features of existence, stitched together according to the particular value that we, as individuals, attribute to them.[185] And we do this stitching because, despite Parfit's insistence to the contrary, it matters to us who we were, who we are, and who we might become physically, psychologically, intellectually, and socially. This brings me to Schechtman's second accomplishment: she makes it clear that our survival as individual persons with individual identities matters to us because we are already individual persons with individual identities – identities, I might add, that are subject to annihilation by deep illness, among other things. And with perhaps a few exceptions, we care about our future selves in ways that are both more fundamental and unambiguous than our concern for others – even if these others are quite similar to us in many respects. While views such as Parfit's argue that we ought not care whether it is "us" or someone sufficiently similar to us that continues in the future (given a certain level of psychological continuity), they seem to be a misreading of the psychological reality of what it means to be creatures such as ourselves. Interestingly, Parfit also seems to be engaged in an apparent conflation of the descriptive with the normative. In his desire to advance a form of utilitarianism, he appears to have misinterpreted the actual so as to defend the desirable. It seems, therefore, that Schechtman goes a long way toward clarifying what sorts of considerations matter in identity formation, and why.

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[185] I take a narrative approach to identity to be a kind of moral particularism. What this means and its implications for identity formation is something that I address in the next chapter.

I conclude by making a few forward-looking remarks, both by way of a transition to the next chapter and also as a reminder that, despite her insightful critique, Schechtman's claims do leave us with a few rather significant worries. Recall her claim that we create our identities "implicitly" in the sense that we do not have to be "self-conscious" autobiographers.[186] As Schechtman would have it, I filter my experiences, thoughts, feelings, and so on through the "lens" of the narrative process, constructing a story, both passively and actively, that has personal significance for me, even if it is selective at best in its incorporation of events, other stories, and so on.[187] Moreover, Schechtman takes the plotline of such a narrative to be necessarily "linear," with stories having a definite beginning, middle, and end. Otherwise, she worries, beings such as ourselves might not be able to make sense of non-linear stories – might indeed not even recognize the storytellers as persons.[188] Both of these claims are at least a little troubling, especially in that they seem to reveal Schechtman's presuppositions about what narratives and identities are, and how they are structured. I suggest, and will argue in the next few chapters, that neither stories nor the identities that are constructed through them are solely implicit or linear. Indeed, if identities do have the kind of normative power to regulate one's moral agency that I suspect they do, then the story about them would have to be considerably more complex. It is with this in mind that I turn to Chapter IV.

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[186] Lindemann 74.

[187] Lindemann 74-75.

[188] Lindemann 75.

Narrative identity takes part in the story's movement, in the dialectic between order and disorder.
– Paul Ricoeur

CHAPTER IV: NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY: PART ONE

In taking Schechtman's views as indicative of the direction in which this consideration of identity is tending, I am brought to one of my central claims – that the role of the narrative in identity is both descriptive and normative. The narrative approach to identity is both more descriptively accurate of the process through which identities are formed and maintained, and it is more normatively efficacious in maintaining or re-creating the fragile, vulnerable identities of the deeply ill. While the previous chapter outlined some of the challenges that a narrative conception of identity presents for more traditional views, this chapter begins to examine the role of narrative itself in moral work, both within and outside of the question of identity. My goals here are twofold: First, to offer an overview of the debate among those who support and oppose the notion of narrative itself and provide a (tentative) defense of narrative as a legitimate method of moral discourse, and second, to endorse a narrative approach to identity by answering one of its more powerful critics. I will first offer a brief discussion of a narrative approach to ethics, broadly construed. Second, I will consider two recent critiques of narrative as a method and as an approach to normativity, and offer responses to them. Third, I will address a critique of narrative approaches to *identity*, and suggest that it is largely without merit. This process of making a stronger case for a narrative view of ethics generally and of identity specifically will enable me, in the next chapter (Chapter V), to focus on a critical assessment of Schechtman's

narrative views, and argue that although they offer us a good place to start theorizing about identity in the narrative context, they do not go far enough (and perhaps not in the right direction) – especially in the case of the identities of those who are deeply ill.

I. Narrativity and Ethics

Although my focus in this dissertation is centered around a narrative approach to identity, it is of course also a fact that the narrative practice that I defend is a part of a much larger conversation about the use of stories in moral discourse. And while the precise definition of "narrative" is not my primary focus here, I do believe that it would be useful to offer a sketch of what narrative is for the following two reasons: First, doing so places a narrative approach to identity in the larger context of narrative, and second, doing so presents an opportunity to evaluate several powerful criticisms of narrative as a whole before turning to the specific critiques of narrative and identity.

Specifically, I focus on three distinct objections: two to narrative as ethical methodology and one to narrative as a substantive view of identity. I argue that, in the end, all three leave us without a clear picture of why narrative (and thus a narrative approach to identity) is either less desirable than its alternatives, or is vulnerable (at least decidedly so) to the sorts of criticisms that are levied against it. I begin with a general overview of principlist and narrative approaches to morality and the two arguments that challenge narrative as method.

II. Stories and Moral Deliberation

a. The Theoretical-Juridical Methodology in Ethics and Bioethics

Most seven-year olds, including, if we are honest about it, our own past seven-year-old selves, do not take kindly to justifications for action (or abstention from action) that rely on variations of "because it is right for all young people to obey their elders"– and for good reason. Even to seven-year-old ears, the reason-giving power of doing without questioning – of doing based solely on the command of universalist principles – seems to be, in the end, insufficient. And so the child acts out of fear of retribution, or in order to receive a reward. Or not at all.

Not altogether unlike our seven-year-old who is unmoved by inflexible justification, Socrates, in the *Euthyphro,* is amazed (and perhaps horrified) that a young man would prosecute his own father – even if the father's crime is murder. The blunt, coarse logic of "murder is murder" held for Socrates the same sort of intellectual and moral appeal that "because I told you so" held for the child: The logically deduced, categorical, and (especially in the case of *Euthyphro*) impartial nature of the commands is also deeply and problematically morally unclear and practically unmotivating precisely because of its rigid universalism.[189]

Specifically, both cases raise a number of worries about what has come to be called the theoretical-juridical view of morality – an approach to moral theory that takes its job to be divided among unyielding principles, the judges who, equipped with the knowledge of these principles and what it means to obey them, make sure that they are uniformly

[189] Here, I address the kind of principlism that does not take into account individuals moral contexts, and thus does not change the valence of its laws. I will consider a less inflexible version of principlism when I address the theoretical-juridical approach and bioethics later in this section.

followed, and those whose moral duty it is to do the principles' bidding[190]: What are we to do about the lack of normative warrant of impersonal moral commands, what of personal relationships, of one's sense of oneself as a moral actor, the context of a given moment, specific demands and valences of facts in situations, and so on?

These worries can be divided into roughly three questions[191]: First, the question of morality as detached impartiality. It seems to be trivially true that personal relationships, friendships, loves, preferences, and the like are powerful forces in our lives. On the other hand, the laws of Kantian imperatives, utilitarian calculus and insistent rights-based arguments all call on us to assess moral claims in ways that prefer the principles, that maximize the good for all, that defer to disembodied rights – in other words, that detach us from any partial concerns that we might have for our lives as we live them. In fact, the work of morality, given the theoretical-juridical view, seems to be precisely to guard against such context-specific (and person-specific) approaches to moral claims.

But what an odd world this would be if we were required to donate blood (or organs, or medical care) first to those who are "most useful" to the majority rather than to those who need them most immediately or those whose care concerns us the most. How strange it would be to view morality as a duty to "never lie," even in cases where withholding some facts might be the humane gesture. And indeed how puzzling to be confronted with law-like principles which tell us to prosecute our fathers with no regard to the roles the play in our lives. The requisite detachment in all three cases, it seems to me, has less to do with sharing moral space with other moral beings, and more with deductive rule-following, with the rules

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[190] *See* Walker, Margaret Urban, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[191] *See* Lawrence C. Becker, "Impartiality and Ethical Theory," *Ethics* 101.4 (1991): 698-700.

applying in the same way regardless of the circumstances of one's life or the particularities of a given moral dilemma.

Second, the question of morality as substituted impartiality. What I mean here is something like this: If I am trying to decide what to do in a difficult moral situation, my reasoning is limited, at least to some extent, by my own point of view, my interest, my situatedness, and so on. And I think that this is uncontroversially so – my self-interest, the things that matter to me, and my subjective perspective are all a part of who I am, and thus a part of how I approach moral decisions and moral decision-making. But making decisions from merely my own narrow point of view is not an adequate way of approaching moral work – in order to be engaged in moral deliberation (rather than in the gratification of personal needs and inclinations), I must take the interests of others into consideration, sometimes including those "others" with whom I have no direct relationship. There needs to be some way to compensate for my moral failings as a flawed human being.

One solution, offered by the proponents of the theoretical-juridical model,[192] asks us to do one of two things: either place ourselves as perspectival substitutes in the position of another person and then, from a disinterested, judicial perspective, balance the conflicting interests, or else forgo the step of perspective-switching entirely, and assume what Thomas Nagel has called a vantage point from "nowhere in particular."[193] This second perspective calls on us to be the perfectly unbiased spectator whose position is external to *everyone's* interests – a position of ultimate impartiality and ultimate detachment.

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[192] Here, I am not drawing a distinction among deontology, consequentialism, rights-based theories, contractualism, and other kinds of theoretical-juridical approaches to morality. My point here is that most of them, in one way or another, require a detached, third-person view-from-nowhere as a way to get around the problem of myopic self-interest and limited moral perspective.

[193] *See* Nagel, Thomas, *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

However, here, again, it appears that the insistence on abstract rule-following above all else leads us to neither a fair assessment of another's point of view, nor to the ideal of unbiased spectatorship. Instead, it drains any semblance of moral significance from moral work. For example, in attempting to determine how to communicate to an elderly patient (who also happens to be from a culture quite unlike one's own, as well as the mother of one's good friend) that her diagnosis is not at all promising, the juridical approach offers us the options of either (1) placing ourselves on the patient's shoes, and then, in a disinterested, legalistic way, reasoning from a position that is distinct from either one's own or the patient's, or (2) placing oneself outside the situation altogether, and deciding from "a view from nowhere." But this approach misses precisely what is morally significant about a decision such as this. It seems that what is morally important in this case is not merely what *any similarly-situated physician* would do for *any similarly-situated patient*, but what this *particular physician* might decide, given this *particular patient*. The moral goodness of the decision is largely defined, and motivated by, the friendship, love, and other non-universalizable, non-impartial facts which the detached and disinterested observer cannot access. Such access requires precisely the kind of enmeshment with others that the theoretical-juridical model forbids. But by separating the value of moral decision-making from the subjectivity of the moral actors, we seem to lose both the motivation to act morally, as well as the significance of so doing.[194]

Finally, the question of morality as constituted entirely of impersonal duties and requirements. Recall's Kant famous claim that only a categorical imperative, free from any and all empirical or otherwise contextual influences, can properly be called a moral principle.

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[194] *See* Stocker, Michael "How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *How Should One Live? - Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

And thus it is the person who acts from duty – rather than from inclination, love, desire, or other motivations not grounded in the demands of the categorical imperative – that is the meritorious, rational, *moral agent.* Only this agent, possessed of an autonomous will, is also possessed of a perfectly good will.[195]

What is problematic here is also something that at first seems to be beside the point: what good is a good will? As Lawrence C. Becker notes, there is in the theoretical-juridical view of morality a problem of

> reconciling impartiality with close personal relationships, as well as with eudaimonistic conceptions of human good, moral virtue, and the good life. It looks as though "partiality" is a constitutive feature of intimate relationships, friendships, familial ties, and our behavior in social groups from neighborhoods to nations.[196]

What is missing, in other words, is the warrant for *why* we, as moral actors, would desire something like a good will (or a utilitarian-based outcome, or a rights-based justification) to be a part of the life that most of us would like to lead – a life that is (morally) good for many individual, unique reasons which are quite distinct from universalizable moral oughts. Given the requirements of juridical moral thought, we are left wondering what there is to admire about such a life, why such a life is worth having, and why disinterested detachment from everything and everything one cares about – that is, detachment from all that makes the moral life not just worthwhile but possible – is the sole path to robust moral

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[195] *See* Mary Gregor, ed., Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[196] Becker 699.

agency. Thus, although duties and laws might very well be part of moral work, the "ought" of morality cannot be grounded entirely in bare, unyielding principles.

Bioethicists, too, have for some time embraced principlism in its various guises. While some (especially in the earlier years of the discipline) have opted for the sort of inflexible principlism more akin to Kant's categorical imperative,[197] others have found a middle ground, recognizing that the valence of principles changes given the specifics of particular moral situations. A particularly well-know example of the less juridical (yet still principlist) view was developed by Beauchamp and Childress in *Principles of Biomedical Ethics.*[198] Edited and refined since its original 1979 publication, this particular model for moral decision-making makes three claims (that ostensibly are the logical product of a "common morality" that "all morally serious persons share") which attempt to unite principles and contextualist thinking into a process that would avoid the difficulties endemic to the more unyielding principlist views:[199]

1. Basic principles and the specific action guiding rules that are derived from them are central to the ethical decision making process in health care situations. (Specifically, the principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice).

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[197] *See* National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *Belmont report* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1979); Beauchamp T., Childress J., *Principles Of Biomedical Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Veatch R., *A Theory Of Medical Ethics* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Engelhardt, H.T., *The Foundations Of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[198] *See* Beauchamp T., Childress J., *Principles Of Biomedical Ethics,* 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[199] T. Beauchamp, J. Childress 3.

2. In any given health care situation, any decision or course of action is morally justified if it is consistent with relevant principles, rules, background theoretical commitments, and particular judgments.

3. The success of the task of justification in 2 can be measured by the degree to which it achieves an overall cohesion of all of the elements of the decision making process.[200]

The way in which this principlist methodology differs from the more rigid ones discussed earlier is that no law or principle is ever *a priori* privileged – the valence of all principles is subject to the context to which they are applied. Although prima facie controlling, principles are informed, through the process of a Rawlsian "reflective equilibrium," by the particular situations in which they are applied. Sometimes they control as principles. Sometimes they are altered, overridden, or modified. And sometimes, a particular situation calls for some principles to be selected (or ranked higher) over others.

Thus, this less rigid principlist approach does require more skill from moral actors in determining *the thing to do* than do the unbending principles of (for example) Kantian ethics: Not only the principles in question have to be considered, but also the cultural, contextual, economic, and personal considerations in which the moral actors find themselves. However, in the end, once the proper combination of principles and non-principlist considerations have been balanced by the decision-makers, "context is of no further interest. The

[200] J. McCarthy, "Principlism or narrative ethics: must we choose between them?", *Medical Humanities* 29.2 (2003): 65-67; *See also* Beauchamp T, Childress J., *Principles Of Biomedical Ethics*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

commentator can now judge impartially what ought to be done in any similar set of circumstances."[201]

b. Morality as Moral Competence: (The Expressive-Collaborative Methodology)

Thus far, we have considered two versions of a principlist methodology: one explicitly unyielding, and one less so. But, it seems to me, something is missing, even in the revised principlist methodology: *the broader context* within which a moral decision is reached. In other words, while Beauchamp and Childress (and others who subscribe to the modified principlist view) allow for the complexities of a given situation to influence the selection and the ordering of the principles that might apply, the view of what "context" means remains much too narrow. What I mean might become clearer if I address my objection in terms of stories and storytelling.

At first, it might seem that stories have very little to do with juridical decision-making – in fact, a narrative might strike us as precisely the wrong way to think about categorical imperatives, utilitarian prerogatives, or rights-based deliberations. However, even if we consider Kant's well-known example of the shopkeeper, we realize that the principles that are demonstrated through it emerge precisely because it is a story, structured in a way to make the principles clear. Similarly, if we tell a story of why saving a future surgeon is better than saving a future murderer, it is the story that makes the moral claim, and thus the principle, unambiguous. The point is that the use of stories is perfectly compatible with all

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[201] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, "Context: Backward, Sideways, and Forward," *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*, ed. Rita Charon, Martha Montello (New York: Routledge, 2002) 39.

variety of the theoretical-juridical model of moral decision-making – up to a point. And that point is the scope of the context of these stories.

What do I mean by this? Consider the following (simplified here) example that Hilde Lindemann Nelson offers:

> The patient, Carlos R., was a twenty-one-year-old Hispanic male who had suffered gunshot wounds to the abdomen in gang violence. He was uninsured....he was HIV-positive.
>
> At discharge the attending physician recommended a daily home nursing visit for wound care. However, Medicaid would not fund this nursing visit because a caregiver lived at home who could provide this care, namely, the patient's twenty-two-year-old sister Consuela, who in fact was willing to accept this burden....Carlos had no objection to Consuela's providing this care, but he insisted absolutely that she was not to know his HIV status. He had always been on good terms with Consuela, but she did not know he was actively homosexual. His greatest fear, though, was that his father would lean of his homosexual orientation, which is generally looked upon with great disdain by Hispanics.
>
> Would Carlos's physician be morally justified in breaching patient confidentiality on the grounds that he had a "duty to warn?"[202]

[202] Nelson 40.

Nelson notes that Leonard Fleck, as one relying on (presumably) a modified theoretical-juridical approach with an emphasis on the absence or presence of "excusing conditions," concludes that the physician ought to respect patient confidentiality, while Marcia Angell, relying on largely deontological principles, concludes that the physician ought to "encourage" Carlos to tell his sister about his HIV status or do so on his behalf.[203]

Regardless of the different outcomes, however, what unites both Fleck's and Angell's conclusion is their (1) emphasis on principles over context, and (2) their atemporal, narrow view of context. It is as if their attention to the present context exhausts the notion of context altogether – it is as if the moral actors within the story just happened to appear there for the purpose of being judged. Fleck's and Angell's discussions of the case display a marked lack of attention to the temporal context, both how the individuals in the story came to be in this particular story and how a present judgment will affect the moral actors after it is rendered. What they are after is how any similarly-placed moral actor *ought* to act in a particular situation, all things considered. And thus what matters here, they seem to say, is the *now,* the present just resolution of a moral conflict, isolated both epistemically and metaphysically from its predecessors and successors.[204] Isolated also, as we will shortly see, from the ways and reasons we tell, hear, and use stories in moral work.

Perhaps as a way of challenging the theoretical-juridical model theoretically and practically, the expressive-collaborative approach to morality, put forth by Margaret Urban Walker (among others), turns on its head both its priorities and its presuppositions. As a priority, the expressive-collaborative approach tends to view the importance of moral work

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[203] Nelson 40.

[204] Or, as Hilde Lindemann Nelson has argued, "juridical approaches tend to move only sideways, considering context as if fleshes out the here and now."

Nelson 40.

not as necessarily the juridical determination of "right" and wrong" based on a set of deduced unyielding norms, laws (and even stories), but more as a way to negotiate our way in the complex and imperfect social, physical, and psychological realities of being human: The "expressive-collaborative model"[205] encourages us to view "an investigation of morality as a socially embodied medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and response." The distinction between this approach and the juridical one is that while the juridical model emphasizes the uniformity of what is required, forbidden, or permitted in a given situation for all similarly-placed agents,[206] the expressive-collaborative model prioritizes moral competence, or, as Walker has argued, "the ability of morally developed persons to install and observe precedents for themselves which are both distinctive of them and binding upon them morally."[207]

Moreover, the presuppositions of the theoretical-juridical model about we ought to expect from moral deliberations also change: Howard Brody suggests that "the expressive-collaborative model views the heart of morality as our efforts to make our moral behavior mutually intelligible and to negotiate the inevitable differences and disagreements as we try among ourselves to determine where our moral responsibilities lie."[208] And at the heart of the expressive-collaborative model is the story – the narrative that is so helpful in moral

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[205] Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 173.

[206] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 16.

[207] Walker, Margaret Urban, "Moral Particularity," *Moral Contexts* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[208] Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 175-177.

deliberation, pedagogy, and all the numerous activities that are a part of our moral work. Except now, what is understood by "story" – both, how it is constituted and how it is used – is quite different.

What I mean is this: The use of first, second, and third-person stories, as I have noted above, is perfectly compatible with theoretical-juridical model of morality. Stories can tell us which principles to use, and why. After all, the story of Carlos R. seems to have offered two different principle-based theorists justification for the kind of juridical reasoning that satisfied them both. In fact, stories can *embody* principles by virtue of being narratives about the pitfalls of certain types of beliefs or conduct – they tell us not to steal, lie, or destroy innocent human life, and so on. Or they may teach us about generosity, the importance of self-determination, the meaning of duty. In so doing, they provide the necessary moral motivation for us to take these principles *as principles.* Thus, the primary distinction between the theoretical-juridical model of moral reasoning and the expressive-collaborative approach[209] is not the fact that one uses stories in its moral work while the other rejects them. They both take stories to be useful – but in different ways and for different purposes.

c. The Turn toward Narrative: Stories, Storytelling, and Moral Work

Let me now offer a different, narratively-grounded, interpretation of what stories do and what to do with stories. The purpose is twofold: first, to consider what we might mean

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[209] *See* Walker, Margaret Urban *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

when we talk about a narrative turn in ethics, and second, to set up my defense of a narrative approach to both ethics and identity which follows.

I have suggested earlier in this dissertation that the use of stories in moral decision-making is not entirely unknown to those who support the theoretical-juridical approach to morality – in fact, stories are quite often used to probe our intuitions about laws, principles and imperatives. Through these stories, principles can be illustrated, learned, defended, or rejected. It might seem odd, therefore – indeed superfluous – that I introduce Walker's expressive-collaborative approach as a counterpoint to juridical rule-following. But it ought not be, for the expressive-collaborative methodology is much more compatible with a narrative approach to doing ethics in that its view of morality requires narratives in ways that mere juridical principle-justification does not.[210]

The reasons supporting this claim have a lot to do with the methods of narrative ethics as well as with the stated goals of the expressive-collaborative approach to morality. Although narrative methodology is not one thing, one approach, or one set of views about what stories do – in fact, it includes a number of claims about the role and function of stories which I will only briefly mention here – it can be understood as "the variety of recent approaches that accord a central role to stories, not merely employing them to illustrate moral concepts such as justice or neighborly love, or to test our moral intuitions, but regarding them as necessary means to some moral end."[211] In addressing a narrative approach to ethics, Hilde Lindemann offers the following summary of what various narrative theorists have proposed to be the role of stories in moral reasoning:

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[210] Although I do not address these methodologies in any detail in this dissertation, the use of stories is also compatible with moral anti-theory, virtue theory, and particularist approaches to ethics. My point here is that while the use of stories is not limited to one way of doing ethics, certain approaches have made a better, more fruitful use of them than the supporters of the theoretical-juridical model.

[211] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, "7 Things to Do with Stories," *unpublished manuscript*, p. 2.

> Narrativists have claimed, among other things, that stories of one kind or another are required: (1) to teach us our duties, (2) to guide morally good action, (3) to motivate morally good action, (4) to justify action on moral grounds, (5) to cultivate our moral sensibilities, (6) to enhance our moral perception, (7) to make actions of persons morally intelligible, and (8) to reinvent ourselves as better persons.[212]

Thus, narratives can differ teleologically: They can be good and bad – instead of providing the sort of insight into ourselves that might be constructive and action-guiding, they can encourage dishonesty, cowardice, or can serve to indulge our fantasies in generally unhealthy, or even destructive, ways. Narratives can be "master narratives" that tell us where and how we are socially situated with respect to our duties, claims, and expectations. One can also resist harmful master narratives through a counterstory, whose purpose it is to "root out the master narratives in the tissue of stories that constitute an oppressive identity and replace them with stories that depict the person as morally worthy."[213] Moreover, one can resist a master narrative through a humorous re-casting of that narrative – a king with no clothes (power), *Victor/Victoria* (sexuality), and so on – that serves to expose the "master

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[212] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 36.

Lindemann notes that

For (1) see MacIntyre 1984; Nussbaum 1990; Murray 1997. For (2) see MacIntyre 1984; Nussbaum 1990; Rorty 1990. For (3) see Nussbaum 1990; Hunter 1991. For (4) see MacIntyre 1984. For (5) see Nussbaum 1990; Rorty 1989; Charon 1997; Hawkins 1997. For (6) see Nussbaum 1990; Hunter 1991; DePaul 1993; Rorty 1989. For (7) see MacIntyre 1990; Taylor 1989; Frank 1995; Brody 1987. For (8) see Frank 1995; Rorty 1989.

[213] Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* 150.

narrative" as unreliable, or at least of doubtful validity. And, of course, the master narratives themselves can be good or bad – while they can oppress, they can also inform, (re)align, and guide. Counterstories, too, can be destructive as well as reparative. What matters is the ability (and desire) to listen or read closely enough, with sufficient attention and discernment, to tell the difference.

Furthermore, narratives come in a number of forms, differing in what they do: They can be read, heard or viewed through the mediums of film, literature, or through the oral tradition of storytelling, thus expanding one's emotional, social, and intellectual vocabulary and perception. In this way, we become not merely better informed about being otherwise, but better equipped in addressing morally complex and difficult situations in the real world.[214] They can be invoked[215] by substituting a "master" model of moral reasoning (say, the Enlightenment model of detached objectivity and rationality) with the kind of normativity that is action-guiding to a particular narrative community that wishes to find justification for, and thus make moral sense of, its way of life.[216] They can also serve as methods of clarification of confusing or contradictory moral reasoning when compared to each other. In trying to work through some particularly difficult moral dilemmas, narratives can help us to see where seemingly divergent viewpoints can possibly move closer together, when they cannot, and why, without resorting to ill-fated attempts to (re)order principles and (re)interpret laws.

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[214] Nelson 37-46; *see also* Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[215] *See* Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Identities, Narrative Repair*, Cornell University Press, 2001; *see also* Hilde Lindemann Nelson "7 Things to Do with Stories," *unpublished manuscript; see also* Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* second edition (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[216] There are, of course, many difficulties with these approaches, but I will not address them here. Suffice it to say that issues of inclusiveness of these narratives, as well as questions of how the narratives of one community relate to the narratives of another are only two examples of how invoking narratives can leave us on some rather shaky moral grounds.

In short, a narrative approach to doing ethics takes its cues from the stories themselves, as they are told, heard, and (mis)understood, and although there are a number of approaches and methodologies, they tend to center around questions of who the teller is, what he teller might mean, who the intended (and unintended) audience might be, what is the effect of the story, and (perhaps less frequently) what constitutes a good story – and what might be meant, in this case, by "good."

This brief discussion of what is meant by a narrative approach to doing ethics – the use of stories in moral contexts – allows me now to suggest why an expressive-collaborative model is more compatible with the use of stories than the juridical one. Recall that the expressive-collaborative model takes its name from the presupposition that morality is be expressive of who we are (or who we would want to be), and takes collaboration among all of us to be necessary in pursuing life in a moral community.[217] Morality, in short, is not solely within the purview of a judge who possesses the necessary moral epistemology and pronounces on a given act as "warranted" or "unwarranted," but is something that

> we do together: it is a socially embodied medium of understanding and adjustment in which people engage in practices of allotting, assuming, or deflecting responsibilities of various kinds. These practices create a vocabulary, as it were, that lets us understand who must or may do something for or to someone, and they contain resources for moral

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[217] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, "7 Things to Do with Stories," *unpublished manuscript*, p. 22; Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

> deliberation that give us recognized and socially shared ways of deciding what is good or right to do.[218]

Thus, the reason that stories simply fit better within this way of doing moral work is that they provide the sort of flexibility and embodied and embedded understandings that this process of constantly revising social moral norms requires. They make possible a way to engage in these moral "negotiations" by reminding us to take into account how we got to the present point, what the present circumstances are, as well what we ought to do in the future, given our past and present. They allow us to hear – and indeed insist that we do – voices that are differently situated, possessing quite radically divergent views of where they fit within the moral fabric of this ongoing conversation. They remind us that different participants carry the burdens of different histories, epistemologies, and moralities. In the end, the expressive-collaborative methodology sees stories as not merely a way to decide among competing principles, but as self-contained, and context-rich, reasons to revise moral understandings, to negotiate solutions, and to continue seeking the ever-elusive common ground. Narratives of all kinds have the capacity to traverse the whole spectrum of human moral experience, and it is precisely this scope and flexibility that engages the expressive-collaborative model in its assessment of, and search for, communal moral competence. Importantly, by engaging with the process of understanding, shaping, and defining our individual and shared responsibilities and practices, the expressive-collaborative model, by employing narrativist methodology, can help us in addressing the question which is the subject of this dissertation – the question of the identity of individuals, or, "who am I?"

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[218] Nelson 22.

But the use of narrative in moral work has not gone unchallenged. Thus, before returning to the question of identity, the next two sections will (1) address several worries about narrative-as-method, and (2) address a specific concern about narrative-as-method in discourse about identity. I now turn to these criticisms.

i. Narrative and Moral Epistemology

Tom Tomlinson, in "Perplexed about Narrative Ethics," suggests that even though narrative might be methodologically important to the development of ethical reasoning, it does not offer "a mode of ethical justification that is independent from or superior to appeals to moral principles."[219] On his view, narrative does not serve the sort of "central epistemic function in the discovery, justification, or application of ethical knowledge" that its supporters take it to be serving.[220]

Why does Tomlinson take this to be the case? First, he argues that stories[221] do not go far enough – or, indeed, any distance at all – toward enriching our moral epistemology. If narrative sets itself against the overstructured and sterile methodology of juridical thinking, as Tomlinson takes it to be doing, then we ought, he argues, expect to find something morally valuable that is unavailable to us through principles alone. However, this does not seem to be the case: First, he claims, if one takes the kind of narrative approach that Martha Nussbaum has proposed and reads a novel in order to broaden one's moral imagination, one

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[219] Tom Tomlinson, "Perplexed about Narrative Ethics," *Stories and Their Limits: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics*, ed. Hilde Lindemann Nelson (New York: Routledge, 1997) 132.

[220] Tomlinson 124.

[221] Although Tomlinson uses the term "narrative ethics," ostensibly to name or describe the methodology of using stories in moral contexts, I prefer to use "narrative approach to morality" or "stories." It is unclear what might be meant by "narrative ethics" as "narrative ethics" is not a distinctive claim about anything, but a method for approaching ethical issues or a tool of moral reflection.

is missing the actual encounter with a living person, and is thereby epistemically – and thus morally –limited by the four corners of the text. Whatever moral "truth" is made available to us by the story, it seems limited situationally to the characters within that story, and does very little to speak to those who do not also share the world in which a particular moral lesson unfolds. Even if we were to set aside literary narrative and enter into a conversation with other people, we still find that the sort of particular knowledge we might derive through these interactions would not yield any moral knowledge that is generalizeable – that translates from one story, or one storyteller, to another. At best, Tomlinson tells us, "novels and stories become....vivid illustrations of knowledge verified through other means."[222]

Second, neither does narrative "bridge the gap" between moral principles and actual cases through an act of "interpretation." Tomlinson sees no clear way to distinguish between how a narrative interprets ethical dilemmas from the application of, and deliberation about, principles. For example, in a case where one is torn between disclosing to or withholding from the patient a potentially terminal diagnosis, an expressive-collaborative approach to moral work might, through the use of stories, require us to consider how much truth to tell, how to tell it, how the patient will hear what is said to him or her, who is doing the speaking, and so on. However, Tomlinson suggests that aside from the vagueness of the narrative criteria itself, what it might mean to "interpret" information is unclear:

> Any social system of reasoned reflection involves a 'communal dialogue' of 'give and take,' including those deliberatively rooted in principles....The failure to provide any more precise account of the nature and role of

[222] Tomlinson 125.

> 'interpretation' is a symptom of the tendency to wave it and 'narrative' as banners that fly over everything bright and beautiful being ignored by those crude and insensitive principles.[223]

Indeed it seems, according to Tomlinson, that the metaphorical, and even imaginatively creative, interpretations that a narrative approach would offer are even more "amorphous and abstract" than the principles they try to replace. In fact, "the richer the story, the less the resolution offered for the ethical questions raised."[224] Because interpretations offer different "takes," "versions," and "perspectives," they might add color and texture to an ethical issue, but they will not resolve difficult problems by offering reasons for choices. And if they did supply such reasons, then they would be appealing "to abstractions and generalizations of some magnitude. Before you know it, you're up to your neck in that damn principle of universalizability". [225]

Finally, Tomlinson rejects what he views as the tendency among proponents of narrative to conflate the descriptive claim that one's life is best understood as a narrative with the normative claim that one's choices – and especially one's *moral choices* – ought to be judged according to their coherence with a given life narrative. First, we do not, he claims, live a life that can be forced into coherence by a storyline – or by anything else: "we don't live out a narrative, we create one by living a life."[226] Second, even if we were to take seriously the narrative we create by "living a life," "the question of how best to live out 'that' unity is not answered by the notion of narrative unity. It's answered by appeal to

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[223] Tomlinson 127.

[224] Tomlinson 128.

[225] Tomlinson 128.

[226] Tomlinson 130.

extranarrative ideals that elevate some kinds of narrative over others."[227] And since these ideals can be whatever I want them to be – I can emphasize compassion and integrity or selfishness and pettiness, and do so consistently and coherently – the resulting coherence loses any meaningful normative force. Unless one subscribes to one "extranarrative" ideal – or, indeed, to one *principle* – over another, the standard of narrative coherence seems to neither add anything to principlist analysis, nor offer an epistemically independent criteria of ethical reasoning, explanation, or justification. Thus, in ethics (and bioethics), and perhaps in many other things, it seems that the most a narrative approach can accomplish is to needlessly complicate things further still. And, given the already complex discourse about our moral choices, we might, in the end, wonder what purpose it serves.

How might a supporter of a narrative approach to ethics respond? After all, does it not seem that, in the end, we all seek out the warrant – the rule, law, reason, or justification – for our choices, and for the choices of others? Yes and no. Howard Brody suggests that a "blind spot" of such a view "has to do with whether we approach any moral task prospectively or retrospectively."[228] In the retrospective case, deciding whether someone's choice to take a relative off life support was morally defensible might involve looking at the facts and applying a set of principles or rules – was it defensible because one was concerned with a Kantian sense of respect, was it a utilitarian move to secure happiness, was it a matter of protecting the rights of the ill individual in the sense of honoring his or her request for no heroic measures, and so on? And if we have established the validity of an act through these principles, is not a narrative approach to ethics exactly what Tomlinson claims it is – either

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[227] Tomlinson 130.

[228] Brody 184.

epistemically empty, or necessarily subsumed by whatever principles happen to retroactively "fit" a given case or a set of facts?

In this case, the answer is a definite no. To say that only the juridical application of principles can justify our actions is to commit two rather serious errors: First, to understand epistemic justification in this limiting sense of principle application seems, well, *limiting.* While a principle, or some idea of a principle, might be *a reason* for why a choice is made – why the feeding tubes are disconnected, why a patient is sent home rather than confined to a hospital bed, why family members' requests are honored (or not) and so on – it is by no means either outcome-determinative, nor even necessarily a part of the central deliberative process.

Specifically, for example, the reasons that Ms.B's family did not honor her requests to be taken home as often as she wanted (instead following the suggesting of the medical staff to leave her in their care) might have had to do with utilitarian projections into the future, and her well being. However, other, more context-dependent, non-universalizable reasons also governed: Gender-based deference granted to the doctors by the members of the family who came to visit most often (and by Ms. B herself), education-based deference between the physicians and the patient's family, and so on. But also, from the family's point of view, they did not want to be "the sort of people who make a fuss" in a public place with fairly distinctly drawn hierarchies. In a sense, by keeping Ms. B under the care of the medical staff, the family, not feeling at ease without her in their familiar home environment, nor in this new and terrifying place, were looking for a way to "fit in" and normalize their – and not just Ms. B's – hospital experience. They too wanted to be viewed as "good patients." But it seems that only by engaging in a narrative discourse with the family would these other, non-principle-based (and morally significant) explanations become evident. The

question, therefore, of the moral status of the choices that have been made by Ms. B's family is both deepened and clarified through an engagement in a narrative dialogue rather than simply through the act of trying to match facts with principles. It would seem, therefore, that Tomlinson's worries about the epistemic vagueness (and, indeed, uselessness) of narrative ought to be at the very least questioned, as ought his reductionist view of stories as valuable elements in the work of norm-creation.

Second, we do not just live our lives retrospectively, in that our task as moral agents is not merely about justifying ourselves to others *as moral agents.* The morality of a given act is not a pronouncement delivered by a judge or a group of judges. It seems that it is something that we do together – or, at least, something that we ought to do together – prospectively as well as retrospectively (and, per Lindemann, "sideways") with the intent of working out a moral understanding that allows for a mutual comprehensibility and intelligibility. [229]

Consider the case of Bill and Sandra W.[230] Bill, a man in his mid to late seventies, has been diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of cancer and admitted to the oncology ward for treatment and pain management. His wife Sandra, also in her mid-seventies, has stayed by his side day and night, only leaving the hospital on occasion for a change of clothes and a shower. As Bill's condition began to take a turn for the worse, the attending physician, the social worker, and a few more staff members begin to turn the conversation toward hospice and more family involvement (Bill's and Sandra's son, Bradley, fully grown and with children of his own, has not visited Bill, and in fact lives a few states away). After a

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[229] *See* Hilde Lindemann Nelson, "Context: Backward, Sideways, and Forward," *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*, ed. Rita Charon and Martha Montello (New York: Routledge, 2002) 39-47.

[230] The facts of this case are loosely based on several interviews with a real patient and his wife on the oncology ward in a midwestern hospital. Needless to say, all identities, conditions, and statements have been altered and disguised to protect the patients, their families, and the medical staff.

few more days of conversation, it became clear that neither Bill nor Sandra have told Bradley of Bill's condition, and in fact, have no intention of telling him "unless it becomes absolutely necessary." The initial write-up of the case said (roughly) the following: "78-year old man, oncology unit, refusing to communicate with family, perhaps exhibiting signs of depression and withdrawal. Suggested psychological counseling for patient and his wife" Some staff members have also expressed their disapproval of Sandra's actions – it seemed "wrong" and "selfish" to them that she would exclude other family members from what could be a very healthy and important experience.

Shortly before Bill's psychological evaluation was to take place, Sandra met with his physicians, social worker, and other staff, and, through a series of conversations, told the story of why she and her husband are refusing to share this experience with their immediate family. She explained that there is nothing wrong with Bill psychologically – it is just that their son had lost his well-paying job, and was currently in the process of attempting to secure a new one. With two children of his own about to reach college age (and with his wife unable to provide the sort of income that this would require), Bradley was under quite a bit of pressure, and thus "this mess with Bill" might just upset him further, distracting him from the task of finding employment.

What we find through a narrative engagement with Bill and Sandra's story, therefore, are the particulars – the unique, non universalizable, non-abstracted contexts of their lives in which they make their moral choices – that help the healthcare team avoid a premature (and potentially damaging) moral judgment. And what is more, narrative does seem to "bridge the gap" between principles and cases by filling in those details, those particulars, that both place principles in their proper context – as a part of the overall consideration, but not necessarily outcome-determinative – and provide the information of the social,

psychological, physical, and other kind of background against which moral choices are made. This no mere "interpretation" of the language of principles into the parlance of casuistry: it is an act of moral anthropology, where appeals to shared values are combined with an awareness of individual circumstances, with the final goal being a shared understanding of the moral issues, and indeed, a shared understanding of moral life. The interpretation of stories, such as that of Bill and Sandra are both a retrospective, prospective, and, importantly, *intersubjective*, drawing on the past, the now, and the future, on the background of the tellers and the listeners. The result is not a mere deliberation about principles – it is a shared, collaborative deliberation about what it means to lead a moral life, to make moral choices, and be a part of a moral community of choice-makers. If nothing else, this is moral epistemology at its most complex and, perhaps, at its most challenging.[231]

We might now recall Tomlinson's claim that narrative ethics forces a kind of an artificial coherence on life stories, and thus, once again, either looks to principles (or "extranarrative ideals") for its normative force, or else offers no independent criteria for ethical reasoning. However, this too seems to be a bit too fast: First, a commitment to coherence does not necessitate a commitment to a principle or to some justificatory rule that exists outside of the narrative structure of one's life story. For instance, Walker has argued that the work of morality has to do with accountability and responsibility – and thus moral reliability, requiring a certain integrity in one's relationships, sense of identity, and values. To be accountable is, to some extent, to be viewed as accountable by others, and this means that our actions have to be coherent at least to the extent that they are reasonably predictable by

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[231] Nelson 46.

See also Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 63.

those who are affected by them in the sorts of situations that matter morally.[232] But surely the sort of coherence that is necessitated by a need for moral reliability is not reducible to a principle (or a set of principles) of, say, duty, utility, or a contractual relationship. I suggest that instead, it is more akin to a desire to be morally intelligible to others, expressed through the sorts of commitments one makes and the stories one tells (and hears) about these commitments. Bill and Sandra's explanation of the reasons for which they have kept Bill's illness a secret from their son makes moral sense in the light of their commitments to his success, his sanity, his peace of mind at a time in his life that is already fraught with tension, and might very well be part of a coherent picture of what they, as parents, value. And the medical staff finally understood this – they responded to Bill and Sandra's story by both entering, and in the end, sharing their moral universe. A narrative approach to their case, therefore, neither requires moral principles to back it up, nor does it leave us with the "coherence-is-whatever-I-say-it-is" relativism that Tomlinson ascribes to it.

Moreover, in his criticism of narrative, Tomlinson leaves out the possibility that a deep illness might fundamentally fracture a life story such that concerns about coherence become more a question about the survival of an identity. That is, one might be so devastated by a particular diagnosis (and the condition itself) that a fundamental rupture occurs not only in one's view of the world, but of one's view of oneself as a part of that world. The work of the expressive-collaborative model and its use of narrative in this case is particularly delicate: in attempting to repair the rupture, both the possibility of a break with the past as well as the desire to reconnect with it call for our attention as storytellers, as well as witnesses to the story. No simple call for "coherence" will do.

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[232] Brody 219.

See also Walker 115.

ii. Narrative and Moral Justification

While Tomlinson's arguments center around the claim that narratives do not offer any epistemically satisfying criteria that we could use in making moral choices, John Arras, in "Nice Story, But So What?"[233] takes a somewhat more conciliatory, although still critical, view. His dissatisfaction with narrative as a method for doing ethics is grounded in his suspicion of narrative as a means of grounding moral justification – of finding the relationship "between the telling of a story and the establishment of a warrant for believing in the moral adequacy or excellence of a particular action, policy or character." Having examined what he takes to be three different approaches to narrative – "as an essential element of any and all ethical analyses," as an ahistorical rejection of the Enlightenment project, and as a postmodern attempt to substitute narrative "for the entire enterprise of moral justification" – he concludes that, while narrative seems to be an important part of ethical analysis, its ability to completely replace principles and ethical theory seems doubtful at best if what we seek is moral justification for our actions.[234]

Arras's view, therefore, is that narrative seems to be merely supplementary to principles, and, in the end, is no threat to their moral primacy. However, even if we take his claim that principles and narrative are indeed two separate ethical projects with different tasks, this does not also mean that narrative is a poorly-equipped and poorly-skilled handmaiden in the well-regulated and clear principlist hierarchy. Instead, I take narrative to have an independent – and independently important – role in helping us do the work of morality and moral justification. This work, as I have argued earlier, is the questioning,

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[233] John Arras, "Nice Story, But So What?", *Stories and Their Limits: Narrative Approaches to Bioethics*, ed. Hilde Lindemann Nelson (New York: Routledge, 1997) 65-88.

[234] Arras 79-85.

doubting, and probing of the juridical assumptions and methodologies by injecting into juridical decision-making the sorts of stories, analyses, and considerations that serve not only to problematize overly principlist assumptions about ethical reasoning, but that also help in creating moral communities of mutual moral accountability.[235] Stories, as understood and addressed by the expressive-collaborative model, instead of playing the silent partner, might very well be the gadfly. The role of narrative presented in this way is both revolutionary and democratizing: revolutionary because, rather than serving as a mere "supplement" to principle, it introduces new, non-principlist considerations that may subvert the principlist view of morality as a set of moves or a "body of knowledge,"[236] and democratizing because of its focus on the importance of our common, shared life in which we, as *practitioners* of morality, tell and evaluate stories in a collaborative effort to make sense to each other as moral agents.

Of course, questions remain about both the efficacy and the role of narrative in ethical theory, but it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve any deeper into this debate. However, by introducing it here, my goal is to locate the discussion of narrative identity within the larger context of how stories can be used to do moral work, as well as to offer a glimpse of the complex concerns that center around the juridical-collaborative discourse.

Given the above, it is perhaps no surprise that the challenges to narrative-as-method do not stop with the use of narrative in deciding *what to do and why to do it.* In fact, we find some quite serious resistance to narrative as a way of thinking about a related, yet distinct, question of *who we are* – that is, about personal identity. For the rest of this chapter, I

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[235] Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[236] Walker 30.

return to this question of identity, and thus to one of the central questions of this dissertation: why a narrative conception of identity is preferable to other alternatives, and why this is especially so in the case of deep illness.

II. Narrative and Identity

I suspect that I am not alone in believing that generally we, sometimes as philosophers and sometimes just as human beings, are moved by questions about personal identity that simply refuse to go away. Importantly, personal identity is a problem in bioethics – especially in cases of serious, deep illness, where identity is compromised by physical and psychological suffering. Thus, we wonder (1) why, quite often, the person we take ourselves to be does not cohere with the person that others take us to be, (2) why we sometimes view our past "selves" as either more or less a part of who we might be now, (3) why changes in our circumstances – physical, psychological, and so on – can dramatically alter the view of ourselves that we and others hold, (4) why some versions of who we are receive greater uptake than others, and (5) why so much emotional, psychological, and social meaning seems to be connected with the question of "who we are." I suggest that all of these worries about identity are deeply normative – normative in the sense that they play a significant part in determining our roles, expectations, and responsibilities in the world – and that none of them is resolved by solely metaphysical, agential, psychological, or other formulaic approaches to identity.

While earlier, I have tried to make the general case for a narrative conception of morality, here I address the question of a narrative understanding of identity. Specifically, I propose a challenge to a criticism of narrative-as-philosophical-method made recently by

Galen Strawson in "Against Narrativity." On Strawson's view, a narrative approach to identity (or, in fact, to anything else) is not only presumptively false from a folk-psychological, or common-sense perspective, but is also descriptively vague and normatively unmoored. I take the opposite view – that by looking at identity formation, maintenance, destruction, and re-construction as a process of the relationship between first, second, and third-person stories, we find both descriptive accuracy and normative structure. And yes, even common sense. What is more, I argue that a lack of such narrative capacity psychologically unhinges us, resulting in at the very least intense and deep psychological distress, and at worst, psychiatric dissolution. Moreover, I suggest that a narrative approach to identity is quite beneficial in helping to develop, deepen, and make more meaningful the relationship between the deeply ill and their caretakers, including those in the medical community. My claim is grounded in both theoretical objections to Strawson's anti-narrative stance and in empirical evidence, although the sort of empirical evidence I have in mind – individual accounts of personal experiences – might not register with those who take Strawson's position as dispositive. After all, they are just stories.

I am not in sympathy with Strawson; but what is my positive view here? First, a point of clarification: When I say that I am defending a narrative view of identity, I am taking what I mean by "narrative" in a non-trivial way. That is, I am generally not talking about the story of why I am wearing a black skirt today rather than a blue one or the narrative of how to tie one's shoes. I say "generally," because while most of the time such stories, although common, do not go toward the normative development of our identities, in some cases they do, or, to be more precise, in some cases, the story of our sudden lack of ability or freedom to do things like choose our clothes or tie our shoes becomes a morally significant, and thus identity-constituting, narrative. Thus, here, I tentatively intend the

phrase "identity-constituting narratives" to mean the stories that depict the things about us that matter the most, either to us or to others, while at the same time suggesting that context can and does change the definition of "what matters."

Second, and more specifically, I suggest that by understanding personal identities as nonlinear, cacophonous, and socially complex unfolding stories that have great moral import, we can begin to restore those identities that have been threatened by the destructive forces of violence, social upheaval, and, in this case, deep illness. I am particularly interested in those who are ill, those who are the caretakers of the ill, and those whose actions and words affect them. Indeed, I take all of us to play one or more of these roles at some time in our lives. Recall that in this dissertation, I focus on deep (that is, serious chronic or terminal) illness, and turn to several lived experiences of such illnesses in order to examine the effect they have had on the identities of the afflicted. I argue that it is by focusing on the narrative aspect of how we are constituted as moral agents that we can best understand – and thus practically address – those whose sense of self is made vulnerable by physical and psychological suffering. Thus, as a challenge to Strawson's dismissal of narrative as a quirk of intellectual fashion, or worse, as a serious philosophical folly, I suggest that it is indeed narrative that in the end helps us to address the very real problem of how illness destroys one's identity. I will first offer a brief discussion of what I mean by a "narrative account of identity." I then address Strawson's critique. Finally, I suggest several reasons why a narrative approach is best suited to addressing threats to personal identity when we are when confronted by deep illness.

a. Narrative Accounts of Identity

As I argued earlier, personal identity, rather than simply comprising the necessary and sufficient conditions of agency (as per Korsgaard or Frankfurt) or posing the "reidentification question," (where Parfit wonders only whether an entity persists through time) is somewhat closer to Marya Schechtman's "characterization question," which concerns what I call the identity of individuals, or, as she puts it, "the kind of identity that is at issue in an identity crisis when we are most likely to ask 'who am I' or 'who will I be tomorrow?'" I take the process of identity formation to be more akin to what Schechtman calls the "narrative self-constitution view" – a process of implicitly creating one's identity through an autobiographical narrative, or a story of one's life, by taking oneself to be a persisting subject who has had experiences in the past and will continue to have them in the future.[237] (However, I must note here that I follow Schechtman only as far as her emphasis on narrative as a way of theorizing identity: I part company with her single-minded focus on autobiographical narratives, for I believe that it is essential to leave room for the stories by which others identify us. I take up this objection in Chapter V.)

Even if we take the limited Parfitian concern about the survival of our future identities as the only reason to worry about personal identity at all, it is only through the characterization question that we can do so with some expectation of success. However, a narrative view of ethics, and *a forteriori* a narrative view of identity of individuals, must be grounded in something other than the weakness of its alternatives. Even if we take the view that neither Parfit's nor Korsgaard's nor Frankfurt's claims about identity address the sorts

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[237] *See* Schechtman, Marya, *The Constitution of Selves* (Cornell University Press, 1996).

of worries that seem most central to us when we wonder who we are, we ought not simply accept a view such as Schechtman's, but see where else we might find some reasons that the narrative turn is indeed one we ought to make. What are some reasons to take the narrative approach to identity seriously? I want to emphasize, however, that in addressing personal identity and narrative, I do not mean to make the following two claims: (1) I am not suggesting that one's identity is an ontological (or transcendental) category or entity that a narrative more accurately picks out, and (2) I am not claiming that a narrative approach to identity (in the sense of "who am I?") is the only mode through which identities are formed, understood, or restored – simply that is it is an especially powerful and efficacious one.

Specifically, the normative expectations of the world for us, and our expectations of ourselves and the world, are in a very direct sense embodied in the stories that constitute our identities. They are there when we are told that "girls don't say such things," that "boys don't cry," that "the doctor knows best." They are also there when we tell ourselves to be quiet (because it is not our place to speak), when we choose to accept authority simply because we do not view ourselves as authoritative in any way, when we defer because we take it to be our place to defer – or when we almost never defer, regardless of circumstances, or readily offer our view, or take ourselves to be deserving of respect, of love, of recognition, and so on. In the cases of deep illness, when we are most physically and psychologically dependent, these stories take on special import, for it is then that we are more vulnerable to certain representations of ourselves (say, as weak, ineffectual, subhuman, and so on), and less likely to be able to construct the sorts of counterstories that let us resist these representations and depict us as morally efficacious.[238] It seems to be right (or at least plausible), therefore, to suggest that identities might very well mark our places in the world.

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[238] For an in-depth discussion of counterstories, *see* Nelson, Hilde Lindemann *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

It is our identities, it seems to me, that serve as the ground of the moral and social expectations that govern our interactions with others.

I take this normative power of identities (and identity formation) to be of special significance to those whose identity, and therefore whose physical and psychological welfare, is threatened by serious, or "deep," illness. How do we respond to someone who has been given a terminal diagnosis when she asks us: "Who am I now that I can no longer work, care for my family, dress myself, or make plans for the future?" Do we respond in terms of agency, telling her that although her own agency is impaired, she is still owed respect by other agents, and is thus now the recipient of their concern? What do we say to someone who, having been a runner his whole life, can no longer walk – or even move? Do we take an inventory of his remaining body parts, thoughts, memories, and so on and tell him that in general, he is still "himself," plus some "disabilities"? Not only would both replies be disingenuous, but they would fail to address the deeper question of "Who am I now that I no longer recognize who I took myself to be?" that the ill individual is asking. When one's sense of identity has collapsed, as it often does in cases of deep illness, we need better, more precise, and more case-sensitive tools before we make any attempts to put these things back together for ourselves or for another. Because the deeply ill are not paradigmatic agents and so are often absent from more traditional identity discourse, we ought not be satisfied with that discourse. The identities of the deeply ill add an important dimension to our understanding of both the normative and the practical force of identity and identity formation. And if we accept the claim, however conditionally, that our identities are constituted by stories by and about us, then it would seem that a narrative analysis of identity would be most fitting in understanding how identities are created, destroyed, and, potentially, reconstituted.

b. Narrative Identity and Its Critics

The narrative turn, in philosophy as well as in other disciplines, is not without its critics, and while the criticisms are many (and impassioned), I will focus here on a particular one by Galen Strawson, who, in "Against Narrativity," challenges what he takes to be the overly dominant and experientially false claims of narrative ethics. I address Strawson's argument not merely because it is quite recent, but also because it presents the sorts of objections that I have found to be fairly pervasive among critics of the narrative approach to ethics – the kind that takes narrative methodology to be overly dominant theoretically (especially within the humanities) and ineffectual practically. In responding to Strawson, I address both perceived shortcomings of the narrative approach, and argue that it is especially in the practical cases that Strawson gets it precisely wrong. One reason, I suggest, is to be found in the role that narrative can play in the construction and re-construction of the identities of the deeply ill.

Strawson's "Against Narrativity" is framed as a response to Paul John Eakin, who, like Jerome Bruner and Alistair MacIntyre, has argued that that the "self is a perpetually rewritten story," through the telling of which "we become the autobiographical narratives we tell about our lives." Eakin tells us that a narrative approach to ethics – and as a corollary, a narrative approach to identity – is "the notion that what we are is a story of some kind."[239]

A brief disclaimer: Although I am very sympathetic to Eakin's views to the extent that he takes narrative to be a fruitful way to think about identities, I part company with him (as well as with Bruner, among others) when they conflate (1) the stories that we tell with the selves that these stories represent, as well as (2) the meaning of "identity" and "self." That

[239] Paul John Eakin, "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan," *Narrative* 14.2 (2006): 180.

is, while Eakin (above) and Bruner (below) are making a metaphysical point about *what* we are – "a story of some kind" – I am making an epistemic claim about *how* selves come to be known through stories. On my view, "identities" are not simply synonymous with "selves," but are complicated interactions of my sense of self and others' views of who I am. They are neither static (or not necessarily static, in any case), nor "things" (at least not in the metaphysical sense of the term), and serve to "mark certain people as candidates for certain treatments."[240] These distinctions will prove crucial to my argument in Chapter VI about why some narratives ought to be preferred over others, and why.

So, why does Eakin make the claims that he does? He is moved partially by the insistence of Oliver Sacks that storytelling is an important – indeed, a central – factor in identity-creation and identity maintenance. It is particularly important, he suggests, in combination with the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio[241], who argued (especially in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*), that identities are constituted by narratives that are neither fanciful nor theoretically detached. Strawson, then, takes on what he views as the "two theses" of this view of a narrative method of approaching ethical issues:

> The first is a descriptive, empirical thesis about the nature of ordinary human experience: "Each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative' . . . this narrative is us, our identities" (Oliver Sacks); "self is a perpetually rewritten story . . .in

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[240] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) xi.

[241] Paul John Eakin, "What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography?", *Narrative* 12.2 (2004): 121.

See also Damasio, Antonio R., *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (Jerome Bruner); "we are all virtuoso novelists.. . . We try to make all of our material cohere into a single good story. And that story is our autobiography. The chief fictional character. . . of that autobiography is one's self" (Dan Dennett). The second is a normative, ethical claim: we ought to live our lives narratively, or as a story; a "basic condition of making sense of ourselves is that we grasp our lives in a narrative' and have an understanding of our lives "as an unfolding story"'(Charles Taylor). A person "creates his identity [only] by forming an autobiographical narrative – a story of his life", and must be in possession of a full and "explicit narrative [of his life] to develop fully as a person" (Marya Schechtman).[242]

Specifically, these theses can be understood as (1) a "psychological Narrativity thesis," which tells us that "human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort"; and (2) a more troubling (to Strawson) "ethical Narrativity thesis", which tells us that "experiencing or conceiving one's life as a narrative. . . is essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood."[243] Elsewhere, I argue for a modified version of (2) but here, I will mostly focus on (1), for I take Strawson, although seeming to be moved by the perceived errors of the ethical thesis, to be really arguing against the psychological one, insisting that it simply does not make sense either as an empirical claim about human beings, or (especially) as a part of his own lived experience.

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[242]Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* (new series) 17.4 (2004): 428.

[243] Strawson 428-429.

Strawson does not see himself or his life in narrative terms, and he resents the thought that he should. In response to Taylor's, Ricoeur's, and Schechtman's urging to engage in an analysis of one's life through narrative, Strawson wonders, "Why on earth, in the midst of the beauty of being, it should be thought to be important to do this."[244]

Strawson, as Eakin has noted, seems entirely too eager to secure a place for himself as a "normal person" who does not require a narrative to either understand himself or to structure his identity. His claim that "there are deeply non-Narrative people and there are good ways to live that are deeply non-Narrative" sets up what he takes to be a crucial (although not completely binary) distinction between "Episodic" and "Diachronic" self-experience, where the Episodic person

> does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future. One has little or no sense that the self that one is was there in the (further) past and will be there in the future, although one is perfectly well aware that one has long-term continuity considered as a whole human being. Episodics are likely to have no particular tendency to see their life in Narrative terms.[245]

The Diachronic experiences himself or herself "as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future – something that has relatively long-term diachronic continuity, something that persists over a long stretch of time, perhaps for

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[244] Strawson 436.

[245] Eakin, Paul John, "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan," *Narrative* 14. 2 (2006): 180-187.

life." Not surprisingly, Strawson takes himself (and many others) to be mostly Episodic. As he puts it,

> I have a past, like any human being, and know perfectly well that I have a past. I have a respectable amount of factual knowledge about it, and I also remember some of my past experiences 'from the inside', as philosophers say.[246]

Yet Strawson does not take the "I" that is considering who he is at the present moment to have any sense of having "been there" in the past, and does not take this not knowing to be a source of worry. Indeed, as an Episodic, as he is too ready to tell us, "I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a narrative without form. Absolutely none. Nor do I have any great or special interest in my past. Nor do I have a great deal of concern for my future."

But it seems to me that Strawson doth protest too much. His central criticism of a narrative approach to identity seems to be grounded in two objections, both of which mirror his initial criticism of narrative as a philosophical method: First, he makes the psychological claim that human beings simply do not conceive of themselves as storytellers (and story-listeners), and second, he makes an ethical claim that even if they do think of themselves as constituted and defined by narratives, they ought not, for to do so would be to be "motivated by a sense of their own importance or significance that is absent in other human beings," while really "just talking about themselves." In fact, he goes even further, suggesting that "the best lives almost never involve this kind of self-telling....completely

[246] Strawson 433.

uninterested in the answer to the question" of 'who am I,' or 'what have I made of myself in this life?'"[247] Living life, and thinking about how one lives it, are two different endeavors, Strawson argues, and insofar as we care about who we are, we care, or ought to care, about who we are *now* – and not about the process of coming to this moment, or the possibility of continuing into any moments that may follow. And as long as we retain our character, our moral sense, and our view of what matters in our lives, the stories that purport to tell us how, whether, and why we are one person rather than another matter very little.[248]

However, for all of his careful distinction-drawing between Episodics and Diachronics and their "non-narrative" and "narrative" views of identity and self, what seems to be at the core of his distaste for narrative is oddly personal: he tells us "that those who are drawn to write on the subject of 'narrativity' tend to have strongly Diachronic and Narrative outlooks or personalities, and generalize from their own case with that special, fabulously misplaced confidence that people feel when, considering elements of their own experience that are existentially fundamental for them, they take it that they must also be fundamental for everyone else."[249] So, it seems that the argument for a narrative approach to identity has to do, above all, with "intellectual fashion" and a bad case of solipsism which he, as an Episodic, simply does not share.

Although I will not address the question of whether narrative is the current philosophical flavor du jour– partially because this is not within the scope of this dissertation, and partially because I do not think that proving the relative popularity of any given theoretical view serves to either uphold its legitimacy or dismiss it as ultimately without

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[247] Strawson 436-438.

[248] Here, it seems that Strawson is conflating the issues of the identity of individuals and individuation, but this distinction is outside the scope of this dissertation.

[249] Strawson 439.

merit – I will turn to his claim that Diachronics suffer from the psychological desire to generalize their own sense of the necessity of narrative to a world populated by unsuspecting Episodics.

My first response is a brief one, and has more to do with the internal consistency of Strawson's argument then with the reasons for which it fails when met with evidence. It seems that Strawson himself is guilty precisely of the same fallacious self-to-world inference of which he accuses the proponents of narrative. If, after all, the basis for his claims is simply that neither he nor other "deeply non-Narrative people" have any sense of life as a narrative, then his argument is on par with his version of the Diachronic assertion which he accuses of improperly imposing personal preferences and wishful thinking on the larger world. It seems to me, therefore, that if Strawson is to be challenged on a basis other than an intuitive disagreement between those he calls Episodics and Diachronics, we must look elsewhere. This "elsewhere," I believe, is the very real and critical role narrative plays in the lives – and identities – of the deeply ill, and it is to this second response that I now turn.

c. Identity, Illness, and Narrative

So what do I mean by "deeply ill," and why do I take the relationship between illness and identity to be a challenge to Strawson's dismissal of narrative as both a descriptive and normative approach to who we are or take ourselves to be? As I noted earlier, by "deep illness" I mean the sort of chronic or terminal illness that is life changing in a way most cases of a broken arm, a cold, or even the less serious cases of pneumonia or flu are not. The way I draw this distinction is not at all arbitrary, although imperfect and not without exceptions. The question that I ask in making the distinction is whether a particular condition is of the

kind that either tends to be terminal, or of the kind that, although not immediately terminal, requires one to be always mindful of its presence, either through treatments, or else through certain serious limitations on normal activity. Moreover, because my emphasis here is on the threat to identity as a result of the onset of illness, I am not including congenital disabilities or conditions that have been a part of an individual's life since infancy or early childhood.

I now turn to my response to Strawson's objection to what he has called the "psychological Narrativity thesis," which holds that "human beings typically see or live or experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort." Recall that he argues that, personal preference and intellectual fashion of the Diachronic aside, the Episodic stance is much more reflective of how human beings both understand and define themselves in the world.

But what would it be like to be a true Episodic? Strawson tells us that what matters to him is his life, as he is living it today. Yet I wonder what Strawson would say about Oliver Sacks's "The Lost Mariner" – Jimmie G., whose memory has been severely impacted by Korsakov's syndrome, and who, as Sacks tells us, loses and invents a new identity, and a new world, every few seconds:

> Homing in on his memory, I found an extreme and extraordinary loss of recent memory – so that whatever was said or shown to him was apt to be forgotten in a few seconds' time. Thus I laid out my watch, my tie, and my glasses on the desk, covered them, and asked him to remember these. Then, after a minute's chat, I asked him what I had put under the cover. He

> remembered none of them – or indeed that I had even asked him to remember.[250]

Indeed, Jimmie, although appearing quite happy and upbeat most of the time, not only forgets the placement of objects, but also has no capacity to correctly place himself or others in time, and most importantly, in relation to himself. The psychiatrist with whom he has spent an afternoon becomes a brand new and unknown entity a few minutes later. Provided with evidence that time has passed and that his relationship to the world has changed with it, Jimmie

> suddenly turned ashen and gripped the sides of the chair. "Jesus Christ," he whispered. "Christ, what's going on? What's happened to me? Is this a nightmare? Am I crazy? Is this a joke?" – and he became frantic, panicked.[251]

In the case of Clive Wearing, a British musicologist, conductor, and keyboardist, known for living with one of the worst cases of anterograde amnesia in the world, we find a similar, albeit much more extreme, example of an inability to form new memories, recall old ones, and generally structure one's life in any way that is more than moment-to-moment awareness. Wearing's diary is filled with statements that betray both his profound disconnection from one moment to another, as well as his desperate attempts to make

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[250] Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat: And Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Touchstone, 1998) 27.

[251] Sacks 25.

narrative sense of his surroundings and his experience in them – that is, to make sense of himself as a being in time. He writes:

> 8:31 AM: Now I am really, completely awake.
>
> 9:06 AM: Now I am perfectly, overwhelmingly awake.
>
> 9:34 AM: Now I am superlatively, actually awake.

Although their content remains largely the same, the entries other than the latest one are crossed out, since he forgets having made them, and thus dismisses them as having been written without the benefit of the "wakefulness" which he seeks – of the awareness of himself as someone who can tell a coherent story about how he got here.[252]

Recall now Strawson's enthusiasm for the present-moment experience of an Episodic. He tells us that "what I care about . . . is how I am now,"[253] and looks to the Earl of Shaftesbury, who, a fellow Episodic, asks:

> [But] what matter for memory? . . . If, whilst I am, I am as I should be, what do I care more? And thus let me lose self every hour, and be twenty successive selfs, or new selfs, 'tis all one to me: so [long as] I lose not my opinion.[254]

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[252] Louise France, "The Death of Yesterday," *The Observer Magazine* 23 January 23 2005.

See also Wearing, Deborah, *Forever Today: A True Story of Lost Memory and Never-Ending Love* (London: Corgi, 2006).

[253] Strawson 438.

[254] Strawson 438.

The claim is that there is no place for, nor any need of, narrative in an Episodic life. But, in the experiences of Jimmie G. and Clive Wearing, have we not seen what happens to those who are Episodics by circumstance? It seems that, even while unable to change the Episodic nature of their experiences, both men nevertheless are either periodically horrified by it, or persist in trying to tie together what they sometimes perceive as broken, incoherent, and otherwise unacceptable ways of being. Even though they physiologically cannot, in the end, care about who they are for any length of time, they do attempt to grasp at whatever straws of awareness their conditions allow them, and force together something like a narrative about who they are, how they fit into the world, and what the relationship between their last experience and the present moment might be. They, in fact, seem to be driven by a deep, profound desire to become storytellers.

What Strawson must account for, then, is this desire for narrative, for some semblance of self that stretches into the past and into the future just long enough not to strand the individual in the absurdity of the eternal present. He must account for people like Jimmie G. and Clive Wearing, who have lost the ability to create narratives but nevertheless dedicate their brief moments of lucidity to it, looking to narrate themselves back into a storyline in which they, and their world, persist. And he must account for Mr. Thompson, who, Sacks tells us, is a seemingly happy, "ebullient comic," but who can also remember nothing for more than several seconds, constantly busy "creating a world and self, to replace what was continually being forgotten and lost....[He] must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment....Deprived of continuity, of a quiet, continuous inner narrative, he is driven to a sort of narrational frenzy – hence his ceaseless tales, his confabulations, his mythomania. Unable to maintain a genuine narrative or continuity, unable to maintain a

genuine inner world, he is driven to the proliferation of pseudo-narratives, in a pseudo-continuity, pseudo-worlds peopled by pseudo-people, phantoms."[255]

There seem to be two possibilities: Either Strawson is not nearly as antinarrative as he appears to be, and is merely offering a good-humored challenge to what he sees as a fundamentally flawed way of theorizing the self and identity, or he is indeed convinced that narrative has nothing to offer either the way we form or the way we assess ourselves as human beings, and takes his task to be to dethrone narrative from what he perceived to be its undeserved position. Although I would have supported him in challenging narrativity – for narrative is not, and ought not be, immune from rigorous questioning – given his claims and eagerness to dismiss, rather than challenge, I suspect that he is engaged in repudiation. And if that is his goal, then it would seem that he is not entirely successful. Through his repudiation, Strawson refuses to connect the capacity for narrative and identity creation. Instead, he supports an Episodic existence, which he describes as a "truly happy-go-lucky, see-what-comes-along," no narrative required kind of life. But consider that narratively impaired Jimmie G., Clive Wearing, and especially Mr. Thompson were quite often also happy, enjoying the present moment, or, on better days, even a succession of moments. Would this, then, make them the true, happy, living-in-the-present moment Episodics that Strawson takes himself to be, and if so, would this not be, at least to some extent, a troubling conclusion? As Eakin correctly notes,

> Strawson's brief for the Episodic life....strikes me as breezy and untested. To be sure, who is to say that "Mr. Thompson" is not a happy man? Who would judge him to be diminished as a person? Strawson, I take it, would not....But

[255] Sacks 109-111.

> would he—or the Earl of Shaftesbury—really want to be "Mr. Thompson"? Perhaps, but I've never encountered anyone who didn't hope that his or her memory and the sense of life story it supports, would survive intact to the end. In my experience, most people fear memory loss and the death of the extended self that follows from it—witness the widespread anxiety about Alzheimer's Disease and aging in the U.S. today. It is this fear that Sacks captures when he wonders whether loss of memory entails loss of identity: "has [Mr. Thompson] been pithed, scooped-out, de-souled, by disease?"[256]

From this, we can draw two conclusions: First, the ability to actively participate in the narrative of one's life is not the useless intellectual luxury that Strawson takes it to be – it seems to be, at least arguably, if not a requirement, then at least a fundamental, clinically observed, human drive which appears to exist quite independently of narrative theory and its proponents. After all, it seems to be no accident that a failure of narrative competence of the sort we have seen here quite often calls for institutionalization.

Second, to engage in narrative activity is not simply to tell a story. It was not a lack of creative imagination that troubled the patients discussed above, but an inability to engage *in* their own meaning-making performances, as well as *with* those of others, connecting yesterday with today and tomorrow, forward, backward, and sideways, and in the end, creating identities that made moral sense to the performer and the audience. Indeed, it was this inability that constituted their illnesses. And this performance is not only verbal – it is physical and social, involving not merely our words, but our bodies and other people. What is more, it often matters *which others* participate, and *how*.

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[256] Eakin, Paul John, "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan," *Narrative* 14.2 (2006): 180-187.

d. Conclusion: Narrative Practice

In this section, I have attempted to cast some doubt on Galen Strawson's attack on the "two theses" of narrativity, paying particular attention to the relationship between actual clinical cases of serious illness and the "psychological Narrativity thesis." I have suggested that we cannot help but be narrators, and that it is when we are incapable of doing so that we suffer deeply. I now conclude by offering a tentative sketch of a positive view of how a narrative approach to identity can be practically applied to the clinical context, and specifically to the practice of medical staff-patient interaction. (I take this issue up in more detail in Chapter VI). I do this partly to counter Strawson's claim that human beings – at least those without the agenda of the Diachronics – have no use for narrative in their daily interactions, and partly to demonstrate what happens when narrative is taken seriously both epistemically and morally in the very real world of medical practice.

As I noted earlier, illness can perhaps be viewed as the story of a patient's experience with disease. It might be a story of how the sick person tried to integrate the disease into an ongoing narrative of who he or she is. It might be a story of violent confrontation and war with a given diagnosis. It might also be a tale of profound resignation and defeat. Whatever the case, a diagnosis of serious illness presents us with a significant break in our life story – a break that has not, until very recently, been addressed by medical practitioners as an issue quite separate from the diagnosis and treatment of the disease itself. The primary focus of medical practice, in fact, has usually been on disease treatment, management, and cure – not on how a particular patient copes with its reality in his or her life. The traditional medical model does not begin to answer the question of "who am I?" that very often accompanies deep illness. The result has often been the further isolation and alienation of an already-

traumatized patient who could not find a place for his or her own experience of serious illness within the abstract and depersonalized medical environment. The kind of identity-constituting narrative that (as I argued earlier) is a psychological necessity for creatures like ourselves would often be overtaken by medical master narratives about "being a good diabetes patient," "following the doctor's orders after a stroke," "controlling the pain," and so on.

Recently, however, some medical practitioners have been turning toward the narrative as a part of their practice, both as a way to more accurately describe, understand, and socially and psychologically (rather than just clinically) locate their patients and their relationships to them, and, with the insight that this narrative understanding grants them, to attempt to help the patients begin to reconstruct their damaged identities. In "Narrative Medicine: Attention, Representation, Affiliation," Rita Charon tells us:

> Another new patient came in in a wheelchair, evidently having suffered a stroke. The referral note he handed to me simply said, "Severely ill 52 yo man s/p aortic dissection, s/p CVA, insulin- requiring diabetes." Initially, my heart sank—he looked so very grim and despondent, slouched in the wheelchair, unable to use his left arm or leg. His chart bulged with bad news. And yet, when I asked him to tell me what I should know about his situation, he began a most mournful and powerful account of his prior health, his joy in life, his hard work and hard play, his ruling of his household. Since his surgery and stroke, his wife is in charge, his sons do not know how to act around him, he cannot go out alone, he cannot visit his friends, he lost his job. I wrote down what he told me....The note, in part, read:....Last year,

> was in good health, worked full-time in the post office, played soccer, met his friends to play dominoes, enjoyed life. He lived at home with his wife and two sons—K and N. He was clearly the head of the household.... Yet, he feels no longer in charge[257]

Thus, instead of simply examining his chart and treating his symptoms, Charon addresses both the patient and her encounter with this patient as an ongoing narrative. She tells us that she read the previously mentioned note to him and gave him a copy so that both physician and patient knew where they were starting their partnership. It was not just a matter of Charon having to know which section of his brain infarcted, but also what his stroke made of him, what it did to him, how he fought back from it, how much he thinks he'll recover, whether he will be the person he once was. These storylines about the patient mattered to him and to the future clinical relationship between him and his caretakers – that they knew these things, that they have heard his fears and rage and grieving. As Charon notes, "In that first visit, we created for ourselves a medical transference that will enable him to follow my recommendations and will deepen my investment in his future, a great and lasting curiosity about his life."[258]

As grim as this patient's situation is, the fact that Charon, as his physician, is approaching his illness – and his life – as a story that is identity constituting opens up the possibility that both patient and physician will view each other as individuals with unique identities that are comprised by particular experiences and interpretations of those experiences. And this makes all the difference to the patient, for it is this kind of interaction

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[257] Charon, Rita, "Narrative Medicine: Attention, Representation, Affiliation," *Narrative* 13.3 (2005): 261-270.

[258] Charon 265.

that takes seriously the kinds of nonclinical, and deeply personal aspects of the clinical experience that otherwise would have been hidden, or simply ignored. Paying attention to the narrative structure of experience – and thus of identity – potentially alters the structure of the patient-physician relationship by giving the identity-shattering experience of serious illness form and meaning: The kind of meaning that can begin to engage both the patient and the physician in the task of repairing, to the extent possible, the patient's damaged identity, or, as Charon notes,

> Out of this work emerges the productive hypothesis that the development of attention increases the skills of representation and that the skills of representing increase the attention. Together, they spiral toward affiliation—with individual patients, colleagues, and the institution that houses them all.[259]

So what of the patient who, having suffered a stroke and requiring, among other things, insulin for his diabetes, was having difficulty reconciling his previous identity of having been the head of the household, yet feeling "no longer in charge?" I suggest that to approach this patient from a narrative perspective opens up the moral space – and thus the possibility – for him to transvalue his values, to perhaps give up his stake in being "in charge." At the same time, with the help of others, he can begin rebuilding an identity that, although in many ways different from his old conception of himself, nevertheless presents the possibility of reconnecting him not only with the reality (and limitations) of his condition, but also with ways of meaningfully living with this condition in the world.

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[259] Charon 268.

Approached from a narrative perspective, the patient is not identified, either by himself or by others, as merely someone who is no longer whole. With the help of others, and taking account of not only his present situation but also of his connection to the past and to the possibilities for his future, he can begin the process of narrative self-restoration. And this, Strawsonian Episodic objections to the contrary, seems not at all insignificant.

We construct a narrative for ourselves, and that's the thread that we follow from one day to the next. People who disintegrate as personalities are the ones who lose that thread.
– Paul Auster, American author

There comes a point in many people's lives when they can no longer play the role they have chosen for themselves. When that happens, we are like actors finding that someone has changed the play.
– Brian Moore, Irish Novelist

CHAPTER V: NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY
PART TWO: CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND DEEP ILLNESS

Thus far, I have argued that a number of standard approaches to personal identity do not begin to answer the important question about the identity of individuals, due in large part to a limited, conceptually constrained, or simply dismissive view of identity and its epistemic and normative role. I have also defined, and defended, a narrative approach to morality, as well as a narrative approach to identity. I have suggested that a theoretical-juridical approach's incomplete characterization of what matters about morality and personal identity becomes more worrisome still if we take into account the potentially destructive effect of deep illness on individuals and their self-conceptions. It is precisely here, in the case of identities damaged due to deep illness, that standard approaches to identity are silent in regard to either how or why a given identity was destroyed, or, perhaps more importantly, what might be required to repair it. However, to turn away from the theoretical-juridical methodology is not synonymous with embracing narrative. This chapter addresses the question of what it means to turn to narrative in addressing the normativity of identity, and specifically how and why such a turn is both appropriate and fruitful in cases of deep illness. I begin by picking up where Chapter III left off – by both addressing and challenging

Schechtman's view of identity as a narrative construct. I then suggest a different approach to identity that retains, and at the same time redefines, what might be meant by a narrative methodology, and argue that it is this approach to identity that tends to more fruitfully address the identities of the deeply ill.

I. Schechtman and the Incomplete Narrative

a. Personal Identity as the "Characterization Question"

Recall Marya Schechtman's theory of personal identity, which takes the narrative form of experience as the unifying element in our lives. What matters when we wonder about personal identity, she argues, is the "characterization question" – the questions of what unique qualities, preferences, beliefs, desires, and so on characterize an individual over time – rather than the "reidentification question" (defended by Derek Parfit, among others) – the question of how one is reidentified over time – that has been at the center of identity discourse. In fact, she suggests that it is precisely because we can give a narrative structure to our experiences that we are different from other sentient creatures: " 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. . . . [We] weave stories of [our] lives."[260] This view, of course, echoes my argument for the necessity of narrative in Chapter IV, and stands in stark opposition to Strawson's insistence that narratives are beside the point. Indeed, they are so

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[260] Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 94.

See also Christman, John "Narrative Unity as a Condition of Personhood," *Metaphilosophy* 35.5 (2004): 695–713.

central – especially for identity formation, maintenance, and repair – that on Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view, a self-conception that is not narrative in form is not "identity constituting at all, nor those who organize their experience this way as persons."[261]

However, although Schechtman grants that narratives can generally take many forms, she limits what sorts of things identity-constituting narratives can be if they are to serve their function of sculpting our *selves*. First, these narratives are primarily autobiographical and first-person, consisting of those experiences which both explicitly and implicitly affect us. What this means is that while some (or perhaps even most) of our narratives are explicitly told to ourselves or others as stories of some kind, a part remains unarticulated – or at least unarticulated in this most direct of ways. This unarticulated part, however, is not excluded from the process of self-constitution. As Schechtman notes, it plays a role in "organizing experience according to an implicit narrative" that helps to shape our views of how our experiences fit together, and how this "fitting together" shapes the selves that we are.[262]

But identity-constituting narratives cannot be "subterranean," in the sense that they must "be capable of local articulation. This means that the narrator should be able to explain why he does what he does, believes what he believes, and feels what he feels."[263] The feelings, desires, beliefs, and so on which might be an unconscious influence on one's story (that compose, say only one's implicit, rather than explicit, narrative) are less one's own than those which are explicitly articulated in an attempt to make sense of one's present in light of one's past. And this is necessarily the case, Schechtman argues, even though these hidden

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[261] Schechtman 194–195.

[262] Schechtman 114.

See also Vollmer, Fred, "The Narrative Self," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35.2 (2005): 189–205.

[263] Schechtman 114.

mental states have an effect on our conscious experiences, for regardless of the effects they do produce, they "are mysterious to the narrator. When a person is unable to explicate part of her narrative, some set of her actions and experiences are incomprehensible to her and, hence, not properly under her control," suggesting that one's identity is fragmented, and one's self "fails to coalesce into a well-defined character . . . impelled by forces he does not understand rather than behaving as an autonomous subject."[264]

Moreover, Schechtman insists that the sorts of narratives that shape identities are necessarily linear, first-person stories – they have the "form and the logic of a story . . . where 'story' is understood as a conventional, linear narrative."[265] The reasons for this have to do with comprehensibility and accessibility: In order for a narrative to be recognized by others as a unified story of a particular self, or to be "identity-defining . . . an individual's self-narrative must conform in certain crucial respects to the narrative others tell of his life."[266] One must be able to explain, through either past or present actions, desires, or characteristics, her actions, where each event, presented in its proper sequence, both finds its meaning and significance in reference to other events: First, when a story becomes entirely too different from the "norm" (for example, from a standard in a given culture), it might not be recognized as a narrative at all, thereby compromising its teller's status as a personal – and social – meaning-maker. Second, life stories which are mere unordered or chaotic collections of events cannot be constitutive of selves, for "thinking of oneself as persisting through time and of the different temporal parts of one's existence as being mutually

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[264] Schechtman 118-119.

See also Vollmer, Fred, "The Narrative Self," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 35.2 (2005): 189–205.

[265] Schechtman 94.

[266] Schechtman 96.

influenced is a minimal requirement of the state we call personhood."[267] The function of the narrative, therefore, is to create a whole *experience* of consciousness "that extends over time,"[268]as well as to provide the narrator with a sense that he or she is an *experiencer* of such a temporally-extended consciousness "who is conceptually prior to its experience."[269] Finally, the narrative, as an autobiography, "must cohere with what might be called the 'objective' account of her life—roughly the story that those around her would tell."[270] This objectivity, however, has more to do with empirical accessibility of stories rather than with any kind of moral view-from-nowhere. In fact, in a footnote, Schechtman clarifies that even though "there is no single narrative which is *the* objective story of a person's life . . . there are certain basic constraints on a narrative which come from the publicly accessible facts about the history of an individual."[271]

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[267] Schechtman 102.

[268] Schechtman 148.

[269] Schechtman 145.

[270] Schechtman 95.

[271] Schechtman 95-96

II. Beyond the "Characterization Question"

Thus far, we have the following claims before us: (1). The standard views of what personal identity is and what it does (such as those of Parfit, Korsgaard, and Frankfurt) all exhibit one version or another of a serious mischaracterization of what we care about when we talk about personal identity – especially the identity of the deeply ill. (2). As an alternative, a narrative conception of identity presents a number of challenges for more traditional views of identity, and appears to embrace precisely those concerns about identity that they dismiss, ignore, or set aside. (3). Given these challenges, a narrative approach is a promising method of moral discourse generally, and a fruitful method of discourse about identity specifically. (4). Thus, the sorts of identity questions that we are after when we want to know who we are – what I suggest we call the identity of individuals (and which Schechtman calls the "characterization question") – can, and ought, be addressed narratively.

However, we also have to contend with the following questions: (1) Is Schechtman's narrative approach to identity the one that seems to most effectively and directly address what is at stake in questions about personal identity (and especially the identity of the deeply ill)? and (2) If this is not the case, short of retracing our steps and embracing the standard views yet again, what is the alternative? In this section, I turn to these two questions, and suggest that while Schechtman offers a promising (narrative) alternative to the standard conceptions of personal identity, she misconstrues both what narratives do, as well as what they are. I argue, however, that we ought not discard the narrative turn in favor of standard views at all, and offer what I take to be a more complete and rigorous account of the role of narrative in identity construction, as well as in its repair.

So where does Schechtman go wrong? The short answer is that she disregards *the imperfect control* we, as individuals, have over our narratives, as well as over their identity-constituting power. The longer answer is a bit more complex. Let us consider the consequences of her claims. First, identity-constituting stories are necessarily linear and first-person. Second, these first-person narratives are subject to further constraints: (1). The transparency constraint: narratives are constrained by the sort of content that is appropriated by an individual as his or her own in that he or she ought to be able to explain his or her feelings, beliefs, desires, and actions (thus excluding any experiences which we might have had, but whose effects on us are somehow "hidden"). (2). The factual constraints: identity-constituting storytelling is not about artifice, but accuracy (to the extent possible). For Schechtman, this "reality constraint" requires that third-person observations count – count in the sense of being intelligible to similar others as narratives, as well as in the sense of being subject to the requirement of remaining "in synch with the views of one held by others."[272] All of these claims leave us with serious and significant puzzles about what Schechtman means and what kind of a narratively constituted identity she might have in mind.

First, the puzzle about what it is that narratives actually do. That she takes something that she calls "identities" to be shaped by narratives is clear; what is not clear is what sorts of things she takes these identities to be. What is it that these narratives constitute? Sometimes Schechtman uses the term "persons" or "personhood" as a synonym for "identity." Sometimes she refers to a "self." All of these entities are ostensibly created

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[272] Schechtman 95-96.

Also see Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 90-93.

and shaped by our narratives – but how odd that for Schechtman, they are interchangeable! What Schechtman seems to conflate are *the metaphysical notion* of "person" as a continuously existing consciousness or the active subject of experience, *the epistemically-grounded* "self" which experiences, *the moral honorific* of "personhood" (as opposed, say, to one being deemed to be "merely human"), and what is actually constructed by narratives – one's *identity*. The result is a muddy picture of what narratives do. If what we are after in asking the question of "who we are" are self-understanding and social intelligibility, then one of the major reasons that we ought to take narratives seriously is that they offer us a way to think clearly about identity that makes us intelligible to ourselves and to others. But this intelligibility requires that we are aware of precisely what we want to know: are we looking for a metaphysical basis of what it means to be a person, an epistemic justification of what we can say about our "selves," a way to understand the point at which one becomes a moral "person," or a way to understand our identities – how we see ourselves in the world, how we are seen by others, and what this "seeing" does to our moral agency? I suggest that Schechtman is indeed after identities of individuals: after all, the "characterization question" is centered on self-understanding, and is in opposition to other, metaphysically and epistemically grounded approaches to identity (specifically, Parfit's "reidentification question"). However, by conflating all of the previously noted terms and thereby making the object of her claims unclear, she further muddies *the reasons why* a new approach to identities of individuals is so important. And it is important precisely because, as I have argued earlier, a narrative approach to identity reveals the interactive, dynamic process of how identities are shaped, and how this shaping serves to *normatively* represent who we are in the world. It does not, by contrast, establish a metaphysical basis for what a person moving through time might be, or justify why someone ought (or ought not) receive the honorific of

"person." In fact, it does not take these sorts of inquiries, although useful, to be central to the question of identity – to the question of who we are.

I suggest that, at least in part, it might very well be this confusion about what she means by an "identity-constituting narrative" that leads to some of the more problematic implications of Schechtman's views. I say "problematic" because if we are to take seriously her claims that identity-constituting narratives actually move us closer to a kind of a self-understanding that is not available through other means, we are left without an answer to the question of just what this "self" that is "understood" might be. One could very well imagine that one's "self" is *just* the autobiographical monologue, and one's moral status as an agent *just* depends on one's ability to tell a clear, coherent narrative. On this view, a patient's first-person narrative is all that is needed to normatively locate him or her. However, as I have already noted above (and as I will argue later), this is most likely not the case.

Second, it is somewhat unclear why only the experiences which are shaped into an identity-constituting narrative must be "capable of local articulation," or a kind of a transparency.[273] Schechtman seems to suppose that we are who we know and can explain to others. But this presumes two things: First, that the parts of ourselves that are unclear to us (or cannot be "articulated" or woven into a coherent explanatory story of our motivations, actions, and desires) cannot be identity-constituting in the same way that the parts of ourselves of which we are aware and can articulate are identity-constituting. Second, that there can be only one "identity-constituting narrative" per individual, and that whatever does not make it into this narrative is not really a part of who this individual is. It might be useful to illustrate what I mean.

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[273] Schechtman 114.

Take S, who considers herself to be a very independent person. She holds down a good job at the hospital, she is married, and her children are grown and on their own. However, repeatedly, as a rule, she avoids being alone. She visits her children more often than they would like only while her husband is on business trips. She claims that she is "just bored" alone and that she would rather "have fun with someone else," but even on a trip to the grocery store she is always accompanied by a friend, a relative, or really anyone else, no matter how dull they might be, who would be wiling to come. However, when asked about her behavior, S claims to just be a "high-maintenance person" who requires a lot of attention. She does not have any known phobias (such as agoraphobia), nor is she afraid of being attacked or otherwise threatened when alone. And she is telling the truth – there really seems to be no reason that she can either understand, recall, or communicate that would place her actions and fears in some sort of context, or that would offer some kind of an explanation for her actions.

Such a case presents some difficulties for Schechtman, for we surely cannot say that the fear of being alone has no part of S's identity-constituting narrative. Even though she is not consciously aware of it (or has, for a number of reasons, repressed it), it affects her thoughts, her desires, and her behavior, and is thus integrated *in this way* into who she is. Others notice her tendencies and her avoidance behaviors – and so does she, although she attributes them to something else entirely. Thus, the pictures that she draws of herself – the narratives that she weaves about her life – are very directly affected by the emotions, fears, and feelings that never quite make it to either her conscious mind or her "local articulation." That is, just because she acts on motivations that are not clear or evident to her, these motivations are no less a part of her identity than those of which she is very consciously aware – and perhaps even more so. The fact that she *is* afraid of being alone – deeply,

pathologically so – makes this hidden fear a very important and active part of her identity. And thus the difference between this fear's being clearly articulated and publicly acknowledged or subterranean and deeply buried is not that in one case it is a part of her and in the other, it is not. The difference is in S's epistemic opacity with regard to herself (and her transparency to others), her lack of clarity about who she is, and why she happens to be the person that she is – not that some parts of her are "really her own" and some are less so.

Moreover, the case of S puts into question Schechtman's insistence that we get one linear narrative per "self." And while Schechtman is not alone in claiming that what we are after is the one true, linear narrative, a single autobiography, of our lives – an "overarching story" of who we are – I take it that neither she nor those who echo her position have gotten a narrative approach to identity quite right.[274]

There are several reasons for this: First, to say that S must construct a single narrative of her life in order for her life to have a coherent structure conflates *living a life* with *telling an identity-constituting story about that life*. The life that S – or, indeed, anyone – lives is made up of a number of events, experiences, interpersonal relationships, group memberships, and so on. It is a manifold of colors, sounds, sensations, tastes, and feelings through which an individual moves with greater or lesser amounts of physical, psychological, or moral efficacy. In S's case, she was abandoned as a very young child by her mentally ill mother, and although she has no conscious recollection of this event, it has, as I noted above, affected her greatly in her adult life, albeit in ways that do not grant her direct access to the actual cause of her inability to be alone. But this event of abandonment is just that –

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[274] *See* Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1992); MacIntyre, Alasdair *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press; 2nd edition, 1984).

For an in-depth critique of the linear narrative view, *see* Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

an event that took place in her distant past. When S tells stories about her life, it is something that she leaves out unwittingly, substituting other explanations (such as being bored easily), or she leaves out instances where she felt uncomfortable with being alone altogether. While this might not be what some (like Schechtman) would call a "true" version of her life, to make this objection is to miss the point: in creating an identity-constituting narrative, we pick and choose among the events and experiences of our lives to create a structure, a version, of the world in which we find ourselves, and thus a version of ourselves in that world. And this picking and choosing does not necessarily take place in a linear fashion – S need not regard her life chronologically or in some other structured manner. In creating narratives, and, in turn, identities, we pull out and connect the sorts of events that seem to go together, quite often from different parts of our lives, and quite often without much regard for a recognizable storyline or the rigors of logic. The point is that we weave something new and something our own – a representation of what we take our life, and thus our identity, to be. *We attempt to make sense of what happens to us* – not serve as faithful, third-person documentarians.[275]

Second, as Lindemann reminds us, insistence on a single, linear narrative suggests what some have called a "rational life plan," or a "career self:"[276]

> The more or less explicit view of Rawls, MacIntyre, and Taylor is not merely that human beings cannot make sense of themselves outside a narrative in which each meaningful incident counts as progress in positioning oneself

[275] *See* Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 61-62.

[276] Nelson 62.

> properly with respect to some end, but that the meaning of a life consists precisely in planning for, striving after, and attending that end.[277]

Although Schechtman does not insist on quite the same level of structure (for she worries more about being comprehensible to others and about the narrative's being a "standard" one for creatures "like us") she does argue for the necessity of coherence and linear structure, supposing that the presence of such a structure would be more likely to lead to a narrative (and thus to a life, since she conflates the two) that would be both explicitly and implicitly sensible. But such a standard for narratives seems to be grounded in a rather limited view of the kinds of lives that we lead, where by "we" I mean the vast number of human beings who are not simply goal-oriented individualists in control not only of what they choose to do, but of what happens to them. Such a standard leaves out most of us, who lead messy, nonlinear, non-unified lives, where we are too often not in charge from either a teleological or procedural perspective. What makes us who we are, therefore, cannot just be our ability to tell coherent and logically-organized stories – in fact, a preference for such an ability might be reasonably viewed as an artifice imposed by the sort of theoretical-juridical worldview that prefers a hierarchy (of meaning, of morality, of individuals) that is both universal and impersonal. Surely living a life is not simply a matter of setting oneself down on a set of rails from which one does not deviate until one has reached one's intended stopping point. As I noted earlier, we act and we make choices, but things *happen to us* over which we might not have any control – serious illness, for example – and as our lives twist and turn and move in all directions, the identity-constituting stories about those lives have to be flexible enough so that we can weave together the shreds of some stories with the more

[277] Nelson 62.

developed sections of others, without our primary concern being about rationality or conventionality of plot. An identity-constituting narrative, therefore, is not identity-constituting because it allows us to follow a life-script, whether about a "rational life plan," or, as in cases of deep illness, about "getting better," or "being a good patient." Why could not a part of a patient's narrative be a story of helplessness and despair, and another part of acceptance, or anger? And why would a particular way of trying to make sense of one's illness be preferable over another? And why could not a physician who has become a patient, as William Hurt's character did in the film *The Doctor*, not have a number of narratives that are contradictory, or confusing, or irreconcilable? Such stories are identity-constituting *precisely because* they are acts of individual creation, following no pre-set course or trajectory. Who I am is not an idea or a story tending toward some defined realization, but a verb, an activity which can move in a number of directions, or double back on itself, or never follow a set process toward a pre-determined *telos*. Perhaps a particularly telling difference in my conception of identity-constituting narrative and that of Schechtman (and others who share her views) is that they speak of *a narrative*, while I (along with Lindemann) take myself to be talking about *narratives:* stories, not a story, and changing, non-linear identities – not a single, focused, and always intelligible identity.

Third, there is the question of "coherence with reality," or the factual constraint. But consider S again: if for S to have a narrative that coheres, or is "in synch with," the views of her held by others, then we might wonder what this narrative would need to be if those others do not see or understand her fear of being alone. If she happens to eventually see the reasons behind her actions while others do not, ought her narrative to filter out this new awareness unless and until the others catch up? If so, the reason for coherence seems to have less to do with a sort of truth the narrator might wish to express, and more to do

with the question of whether this truth is also clear to, or accepted by, the majority of her "audience." Moreover, by insisting on the factual constraints, are we also not placing a bit too much power in the hands of those who evaluate our narratives? In other words, if it is the outside world which has the final say on whether S's (or anyone else's) narrative is sufficiently mistake-free, then we seem to be (problematically) assuming that this outside world will not be prone to the sorts of weaknesses to which we take the individual narrator to be prone – such as prejudice, bad judgment, or personal interest – or that those who are a part of this world could never be simply *mistaken.* A consensus, it seems to me, ought not necessarily be the sole (or even the most reliable) indicator of truth, for there has been a degree of social agreement on narratives about everything from the oppression of women, to slavery, to genocide. And what if I am a female, or, like S, possibly suffering from a mental illness, or a minority, or an immigrant? Does not my already-vulnerable status become even more so if I am to submit to the judgment of others as to who I am?[278] It seems to me that we can answer these questions in the affirmative with some confidence, and in so doing, further cast into doubt Schechtman's (and others') insistence on a criterion of external verifiability of identity-constituting narrative.

I now take up what I consider to be one of the most fundamental difficulties with views like Schechtman's – a view of identity formation, and thus of moral agency, that is unfinished at best. For the sake of argument, let us grant her and those who share her views the necessity of a linear, socially coherent narrative that is "capable of local articulation." What we must not grant her, however, is her insistence that an identity-constituting narrative is the product of an individual competence only, completely

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[278] For an in-depth analysis of the "coherence with reality" criterion, *see* Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 91-92.

independent of second and third-person stories about the narrator. Instead, I claim that a truly identity-constituting narrative involves more than one voice, and thus cannot be the sort of monologue that Schechtman proposes.

The reason that we should not grant her the "autobiographical" claim is the following. In reframing our worries about the identity of individuals, she is after the characterization question – the question of how we understand ourselves through our actions, ideas, and experiences, and how this self-understanding forms our identities. Recall that for her, the "who am I?" question is best answered by the manner in which one arranges these actions, experiences, and characteristics into stories. And these stories do *the moral work* of identifying the storyteller to herself and to the outside world.

So far, so good. But notice that personal identity for Schechtman is *a monologue*: What I, as a (linear, coherent) storyteller say my identity is, so it must be, within the limits set by the transparency and reality constraints . And this seems to be at least a little odd, considering that (as I have suggested earlier) a narrative methodology belongs more to the expressive-collaborative approach to moral work with its particularist focus on individual life stories and circumstances, as well as its emphasis on mutual understanding and negotiation of one's place as a moral being. What Schechtman seems to be saying is that *we, as narrators*, get to say *definitively* who we are. And, given my argument for what identities are and how they are formed, this simply does not appear to be the case: Identities are not merely descriptive, or *aesthetic*, creations. They are always-unfinished, forever in–progress processes that situate us *morally* , not only setting up normative expectations for ourselves, but also shaping the larger, other-dependent moral landscape – the rules, norms, and limits of how others might treat us and what they might expect from us (and we from them). The identity-constituting narrative process thus marks us normatively as particular kinds of moral agents

in terms of how, and of how much, our agency can be exercised. The social nature of identities is therefore inseparable from the social nature of morality, and Schechtman's reliance on monologues as identity-constituting narratives is at best troubling and at worst dismissive of what I take to be a necessary link-up between identity and normativity.

What this link-up suggests is that in the case of morality (and identity), neither top-down rules nor unyielding norms serve as the final arbiters of what is right or true or good. But note also that similarly to the negotiation-centered expressive–collaborative model of morality, the narrative process of identity creation requires *others* as a part of the collaborative process of becoming, and being seen as, moral agents. If I am correct and our identities are indeed representations of ourselves to the world – if they are the lenses through which we see ourselves and through which others see us – then it would seem that we, by ourselves, cannot be their solitary shapers. It is not sufficient, therefore, to have the capacity to tell a coherent narrative that is "capable of local articulation" or the capacity to explicitly access one's experiences and translate them into a socially acceptable and understandable story. We also need input, recognition, and uptake from others, who might be our intended or unintended audience. If we say "I am x," but the world responds with "well, not really – you are more of a y, which means that you cannot do math, be in charge, or be owed the kind of respect that x's are owed," it is insufficient to simply carefully repeat one's monologue. It is necessarily through this interaction between our narratives and the world's uptake of, and reaction to, them that identity emerges as something that is not just narratively constructed, but as a creation of many narratives, from a number of sources. And given the social, multi-faceted process of identity-creation, we can also with some confidence claim this social, multi-faceted nature for morality

Specifically, what might be needed in *some* cases is a counterstory, and, as argued by Hilde Lindemann, such counterstories can and do repair the damage of oppressive master narratives that marginalize one's moral agency by trivializing, stereotyping, or otherwise silencing one's identity-constituting narrative.[279] My goal here, however, is not to address the need for counterstories (although I certainly agree with Lindemann that they are both useful and necessary). First, my argument is in a sense more general: in suggesting a revision of Schechtman's views, I claim that much depends on second- and third-person recognition of autobiographical narratives, for in order to be moral agents in a world of more than one – and to be recognized as such through one's identity – a well-narrated monologue might be a necessary, but far from sufficient, component. Second, my argument is also more specific to the extent that its *telos* is the identity of the deeply ill (rather than all potentially oppressed individuals, groups, and subgroups). I now conclude this section by addressing why identity construction cannot be simply a matter of autobiographical coherence, and in the next, turn to my claim that only a revised version of Schechtman's "characterization"-based methodology can speak to the kinds of issues that the identities of the deeply ill tend to raise.

[279] *See* Nelson, Hilde Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

a. The Story of B: Identity and Normative Competence

Although my first claim – that much depends on second- and third-person recognition of autobiographical narratives – is rather uncontroversial in those circles that take Walker's expressive–collaborative model of morality, as well as narrative methodology, to be a viable place to start, it is nevertheless too often viewed as a bit of philosophical intransigence by those who embrace the theoretical-juridical view of both morality and identity.[280]

An example might be of use here: B is a woman in her mid-to-late sixties, an immigrant, and although not entirely unfamiliar with the language of her adopted country, is also not altogether comfortable with its nuances, colloquialisms, and specifically, its medical argot. To compound the problem, she is a little hard of hearing, and her pronunciation immediately reveals her as a foreigner. In a physician's office (to which she drove herself, despite her dislike of highways and traffic), she is waiting for her appointment when a much younger man walks in, pushing a wheelchair in which a very elderly lady sits, clearly in some discomfort. The young man attempts to communicate with the receptionist, but with no luck, as his accent and lack of facility with English render him all but incomprehensible. However, B can tell from his accent that he is a fellow countryman, as well as the reason he is there. What he is trying desperately to get across is that his elderly aunt (who lives alone) has fallen several times in the last week, cannot sleep, and is in a great deal of pain. He was

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[280] For views that take the theoretical-juridical view to be the proper way to examine the issues of autonomy, agency, and identity, *see* Korsgaard, Christine, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 101-132; Korsgaard, Christine, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Parfit, Derek, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Dworkin, Gerald, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Frankfurt, Harry G., *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Neely, Wright, "Freedom and Desire," *Philosophical Review* 83.1 (1974): 32-54; Watson, Gary, *Free Will (Oxford:* Oxford University Press, 2003).

sent to this particular office by the ER physician who thought that immediate attention was required. This scene looks very familiar to B who, as an immigrant herself, has frequently been on the receiving end of the frustration that comes from linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as of the kindnesses that come from strangers who, on a number of occasions, have stepped in to help her in what otherwise would have been intolerable, or very difficult, situations. Now that B feels a little more settled and sure of herself in her still-new environment, she has made it a priority not to ignore the needs of others when there is something that she could reasonably do. Thus, B approaches the young man – who is overjoyed to have a much-needed translator available – and assures him that she would talk to the receptionist, and the physician if necessary. How fortunate, she thinks, that she is there at the same time, for the language and culture that they share is not one commonly found in this particular neighborhood, or, in fact, this city. However, when she begins speaking to the receptionist, an odd thing happens: She is asked to take her seat, wait for her name to be called and to allow "the staff . . . to sort this out." When she objects, noting that nobody on "the staff" speaks the young man's language, she is once again assured that "everything is under control," except that now, the receptionist calls her "honey," takes her by the arm as if she were disabled, and gently leads her back to her chair. When B asks to talk to the physician, she is told that he is "very busy" and does not have time for "chatter . . . even with his favorite Russian." "Do not worry yourself about these people, honey," the receptionist says again. "We will figure out what is wrong with him and his granny." When B notes that the elderly woman is in fact his aunt and that she knows that there is nobody else in the office who could help, at least as far as translation, the assistant who comes out to see what all the commotion is about smiles, takes B's hand into her own, and speaks very slowly and loudly, deliberately enunciating each word: "So good to see you

again! I see that you find all kinds of ways to keep yourself busy – good for you! The doctor will see you shortly – have you been doing those exercises that he told you to do? Do you understand me, sweetie?" Meanwhile, the young man is desperately trying to locate a friend or a relative who could serve as a translator on the phone. "Does your granny have Medicaid or Medicare?" the receptionist continues repeating.

What we see here is an odd combination of a deliberate, coherent, and definitely "locally articulated" narrative, both physically and verbally enacted by B: "Here I am," her narrative suggests, "an inhabitant of the two cultures that are relevant in this case – and I am ready to help, because I am the sort of person who desires to help when I can." (Of course, I am not suggesting that this is her only narrative strand, for narratives are woven from many such strands. In this case, however, this is the part of her narrative that was most relevant, and one which she most desired to be heard.)

And yet it seems that the identity-constituting narrative out of which B acts is not enough, for the kinds of attitudes that the medical office staff take toward B's behavior ultimately determine the efficacy of her moral agency. In short, she is identified as someone who cannot, perhaps because of her status as an immigrant, her accent, her age, her gender, the fact that she is a patient, be taken seriously – even when there is clear evidence of her intention, capacity and desire to help, as well as a dire need of her assistance. The attitudes taken toward an individual by others, therefore, seem to determine the moral weight that an autobiographical narrative is granted, and thus the moral shape of the identity of that individual. If the individual's narrative about herself is rejected or dismissed (as in B's case) then her identity is defined (and limited) in such a way that also limits her moral agency.[281]

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[281] Lindemann 26-27.

Like B, one could be normatively competent, quite capable of understanding and acting on moral norms and so expressing oneself as a moral agent, yet fail to receive the sort of uptake that moral actors are to be granted. As Lindemann puts it:

> How we register what someone is doing thus determines whether we will allow them to exercise their agency freely, on the one hand, or constrain them. . . . Normative competence is therefore genuinely interpersonal: the capacity for normative self-disclosure embraces not only the agent's ability to appreciate the moral construction that others will place on her actions but also the recognition by those others that her actions are those of a morally developed person.[282]

B is quite literally silenced as a narrator, and thus, as a moral agent in two ways: First, she is very clearly not taken to be a part of the moral community, her identity instead restructured as that of a "lesser" or an "other." Second, and perhaps even more crucially, she (as a patient, an immigrant, a woman, an older person) is taught to silence herself, her own narrative, in favor of the identity that is *constructed for her by others* – especially others in power. Her identity receiving no uptake, she might not speak out the next time, or she might do so with greater apprehension – after all, oppression and responses to it can be learned behaviors. What seems fairly certain, however, is that Schechtman's claims about the coherent, linear autobiography as the primary identity-constituting narrative are at best

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See also Benson, Paul "Feminist Second Thoughts about Free Agency," *Hypatia* 5 (1990): 47-64; Paul Benson, "Free Agency and Self-Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* 91.12 (1994): 650-668.

[282] Lindemann 26-27.

unclear, and at worst only half-right. And it is the half that she seems to neglect – the interpersonal, other-centric part of narrative construction – that appears to be especially important in situations of great power differentials between the narrator and those to whom she is narrating. This seems to be particularly the case when we consider the identities of the deeply ill, and it is to this issue that I now turn.

III. Narrative Identity and the Deeply Ill

Hopeful metaphors of the phoenix rising from the ashes aside, to talk about deep illness, I suggest, is to a large extent to talk about some kind of loss. This loss might be short-lived or permanent; physical, psychological, or both; devastating or merely inconvenient or embarrassing. And whatever the specifics of a given case, there is usually a shift in narrative, and thus *moral*, efficacy, whereby the ill individual, as a result of illness but also as a result of the reactions and actions of others in response to the illness, loses some (or all) of his or her narrative power as a storyteller and identity-shaper. It is here, when otherwise able narrators are confronted by the brute fact of illness and the subsequent powerlessness and disruption (sometimes to the point of disintegration) of their identity-constituting narratives, that we see the holes begin to emerge in Schechtman's insistence on a coherent autobiography. Given her emphasis on the power of individual voices in identity creation, it is constructive to consider what happens to those voices when they are faced the possibility of their own destruction. This seems to me to be not at all an unimportant matter – a matter which has, it turns out, quite a bit to do with the distribution of social (and thus narrative) power.

The questions of power and disempowerment are as legitimate a part of the conversation about the identity of the deeply ill as treatment effectiveness, access to care, and palliation. This is due at least in part to the physical, and more often than not psychological, changes that confront an individual who becomes seriously ill: The disease itself, as well as the more personal, individual experience of that disease, take their toll. And as one's own capacities to sustain a sense of self weaken, the input of others into one's identity increases both procedurally and substantively. Procedurally, because the others may simply take over the task of identity construction from the ill individual, assuming him or her to be incapable of finding his or her own way through the numerous physical, psychological, or moral challenges of deep illness. Thus, a physician may only address the family members of an ill woman who happens to be sitting right there in the examination room, and who, although in pain, is perfectly capable of hearing and understanding his questions and instructions. Substantively, because others may introduce a number of master narratives (say, about what it means to be a "good patient," to "get better," to "be brave," and so on) into the discourse with the ill individual who, even while finding the master narrative distasteful, offensive, or just plain oppressive and hurtful, might have neither the energy nor the desire to challenge it with a counterstory. Thus, a husband might tell his wife that she "has to be strong and get better for the kids" just when her ideas about who she is and how she fits in the world collapse around her. What is lost in the case of the ill woman in the examination room and the wife who "has to be strong for the kids" is not just the capacity to narrate their stories – the illness may have taken care of that to some extent – but the willingness of others to grant both women some semblance of moral agency. And so the story of B repeats itself, although in circumstances even more precarious for the silenced

narrators. In the end, the ill become the acted-upon, rather than the actors – the witnesses to their own narratives, rather than direct participants and authors.

But might it not be a good thing that others step in when the narrator can no longer do so himself or herself? That is, might we not view this power shift as a way to address the loss of moral agency on the part of the ill individual in a manner that carries them through the experience of illness? Yes and no. In this section, I focus on some of the more troubling effects of this loss of narrative competence and second and third-person uptake. I suggest that, given the sorts of problem posed by what happens to the identities of the deeply ill, we need a revised narrative approach to identity creation, and especially in the case of the deeply ill, *identity maintenance.*

So what, specifically, takes place when one faces serious illness? Deep illness, at least how I define it here, is first and foremost a kind of a fundamental disruption of one's identity, of one's narrative, of one's sense of self – and thus of one's power and social efficacy, no matter how little of it one possessed before the onset of illness. Oliver Sacks, having avoided what I would take to be deep illness but nevertheless suffering from a serious leg injury as a result of a fall while climbing a mountain in Norway, was afflicted by an odd and rare neurological condition which alienated him from his leg, where his limb became a truly foreign object. He took this experience to be not just a split from his leg, but a schism in his identity, or, as he put it, "not just a lesion in my muscle, but a lesion in me"[283] – "a hole in reality"[284]:

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[283] Oliver Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On* (London: Picador, 1991) 44.

Also see Rimmon-Kenan, Sholmith, "The story of 'I': Illness and narrative identity," *Narrative* 10.1 (2002): 9-19.

[284] Sacks 68.

> The leg had vanished, taking its 'past' away with it. I could no longer remember having a leg. I could no longer remember how I had ever walked and climbed. I felt inconceivably cut off from the person who had walked and run, and climbed just five days before. There was only a 'formal' continuity between us. There was a gap–an absolute gap–between then and now; and in that gap, into the void, the former 'I' had vanished[285].

Similarly, Barbara D. Webster, seriously ill with multiples sclerosis, noted that "disturbance of body image is very shattering. It disturbs the very experience and root of self."[286] Robert Murphy, an anthropologist at Columbia University, found himself totally paralyzed and unable to speak as a result of a tumor in his spinal cord which developed over the course of fourteen years. And as his body gradually became alien to him he felt a kind of a "radical dissociation from the body, a kind of etherialization of identity."[287] "From the time my tumour was first diagnosed until my entry into a wheelchair life, I was increasingly afraid that I had lost much more than the full use of my legs. I had also lost a part of myself. . . . I had changed in my own mind, in my self-image, and in the basic conditions of my existence. In middle age, the ground beneath me had convulsed."[288]

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[285] Sacks 58.

[286] Barbara D Webster, *All of a Piece: A Life with Multiple Sclerosis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 124.

Also see Rimmon-Kenan, Sholmith, "The story of 'I': Illness and narrative identity," *Narrative* 10.1 (2002): 9-19.

[287] Robert F. Murphy, *The Body* Silent (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1987) 86.

For other stories of deep illness, *see* Middlebrook, Christina, *Seeing the Crab: A Memoir of Dying* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Lorde, Audre, *The Cancer Journals*, (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1980).

[288] Murphy 73.

The question comes down to this: I have argued throughout this dissertation that identities are narratively constructed, and have suggested that views like Schechtman's are preferable over those which take questions of identity to be, among other things, worries about metaphysical continuity through time. I have also suggested that it is specifically a narrative approach to identity that helps us think about identity as a normative concept which regulates our moral agency. But it seems to me that not every narrative methodology will do – especially in cases of deep illness, where our identity and our capacity to be narrators who receive social uptake are both dramatically limited, if not destroyed. Given these stories of identity destruction, how ought we proceed narratively? Considering the problems inherent in Schechtman's claims, how ought we begin to think about identity repair that does not at the same time reduce the process to a rigid set of (moral) rules for the ill individuals to follow, to some universal sense of "getting it right," or else to the crude relativism of "whatever story you tell is a good story"?[289]

We can begin by making the following claims about how some key features of Schechtman's narrative methodology fare at the intersection of identity and deep illness:

(1). *The claim against narrative flatness:* Deep illness tends to bring about a marked disruption of any "linear" story of who one takes oneself to be in the world.

(2). *The claim against necessary coherence with reality:* As a constraint on storytelling and identity formation, the demand for coherence with

[289] I will address the worry about narrative relativism in Chapter VI. Here, I am talking about views such as Arthur Frank's, who suggested that "what counts about any story is what those who hear it choose to do with it."

See Frank, Arthur W. "Asking the Right Question about Pain: Narrative and *Phronesis*," *Literature and Medicine* 23.2 (2004): 209-225.

reality in the case of the deeply ill might be rather destructive and oppressive: Even if others take the ill person to be wrong in his or her assessment of any future plans or goals, or mistaken about the threat that a given diagnosis represents, he or she might very well wish to honor the disruption and upheaval of the illness and resist by simply "falling apart," without regard for outside validation of his or her actions. Moreover, given the power differentials between the ill and the medical establishment, there seems to be an inherent danger in allowing the ill person to be entirely defined by medical practitioners.

(3). *The claim against narrative-as-autobiography:* Quite contrary to Schechtman's claims about the autobiographical nature of identity-constituting narratives, the power of others in identity construction might become even greater in the case of deep illness. Thus, whatever balance existed among individuals in our practices of responsibility through which we take on (or refuse) certain social roles and identities, it is threatened by the relative normative powerlessness of the ill.

(4). *The claim against the requirement for local articulation:* Even though the notion of personal upheaval or disruption is not unique to cases of deep illness – people's lives are fundamentally disrupted for all kinds of reasons, including war, immigration, epiphanies, and so on – the kinds of changes that tend to accompany deep illness are both physically and psychologically intimate in ways that some others are

> not, for they implicate every aspect of who we are or who we take ourselves to be. This also means that these changes are quite complex, and thus we cannot demand explicit narrative transparency from the deeply ill. In their identity construction, they might be influenced *the most* by that which they do not yet understand or cannot yet express or explain – by unconscious fears, a sense of powerlessness, and so on. Despite this lack of narrative transparency, such a narrative would not be any less identity-constituting then the ones "capable of local articulation."

Where does this leave us? The answer is in a somewhat unsettled place. We desperately need to address the identities of the deeply ill, and yet we seem to be stuck: On the one hand, a narrative approach to identity seems to be the direction in which we ought to proceed, especially in the case of deep illness. On the other hand, identity-constituting narratives are not without their serious flaws, from Schechtman's tendency toward monologue to the potential for a relativistic embracing of every story as equally valid morally and epistemically.[290] With this dilemma in mind, I conclude the dissertation with Chapter VI, which proposes several possible approaches to narrative identity construction generally, and to the problem of the identities of the deeply ill specifically. As a way to address the worry about relativism, I ask the normative question about what makes one narrative better than another, and suggest that there is indeed a way to navigate the precarious territory between the theoretical-juridical view of morality and moral relativism. That is, given my

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[290] For some well-known arguments that tend to support identity relativism, *see* Frank, Arthur W., *The Wounded Storyteller: Body Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

earlier argument that identity and morality are connected in that identities embody moral norms and give rise to normative expectations, I now claim that there is a way to link up narratively-constituted identity creation and maintenance with moral judgments about which narratives deserve uptake, and which ought possibly be disregarded. I then explore a few tentative reasons why making such a distinction ought to be one of our goals in an analysis of the identities of the deeply ill (and perhaps in any analysis of identities of individuals, broadly construed). In the end, I suggest that a narrative approach to identity is, after all, an imperfect but promising way to think about what makes us who we are, how we build and repair ourselves and each other when broken, and why any of this ought to matter.

Testimony should be a philosophical problem and not limited to legal or historical contexts where it refers to the account of a witness who reports what he has seen.
– *Paul Ricoeur*

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
– *T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"*

CHAPTER VI: WHICH STORIES MATTER, AND WHY: SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation is about our attempts to set our lands in order – especially after the annihilation as a result of serious illness. I have claimed that these "lands" – our identities, our representations of who we are, our sense of ourselves – have been inadequately (and often overly narrowly) construed, leaving out the central *normative* worry about our identities as individuals. I have suggested that this theoretical lapse becomes especially clear when we take into account what happens to identities as a result of deep illness, and argued that since none of us are immune from either *being* the ill individual or from *finding ourselves* as his or her caretaker, this conflict between the standard views of identity and what I call the identity of individuals is neither theoretically marginal nor practically beside the point. I have then argued that if we do indeed take the notion of identity as a normative matter seriously, we ought to (generally) reject the universalism of the theoretical-juridical approach to morality in favor of a more particularist, context-sensitive expressive-collaborative methodology. And the role that stories play in the expressive-collaborative approach to morality seem to lead us to a narrative approach to the identity of individuals.

So we might tentatively conclude that it is through narratives that we might begin to see more clearly how identities are shaped, and how they might be reconstituted, especially in the cases of deep illness. But we have also seen that a narrative approach is not without some serious problems. Even if we accept my claims that this identity-constituting narrative has to consist of many kinds of stories and strands of stories, told through first, second, and third-person perspectives, and that it need not be linear or constrained by a reality as observed by others, or narratively transparent, we are still not certain about how to distinguish *normatively* among various narratives. I note that my focus in this chapter will be primarily on illness narratives, and thus my claims ought not be viewed as necessarily applicable to any and all kinds of narratives (although I do suspect that some of my arguments might be generalizeable to narratives that are not necessarily grounded in deep illness). Specifically, I suggest that my argument that a narrative approach to identity is a deeper and more fruitful method of addressing who we are (especially when we are seriously ill) is only a part of the story – more needs to be said about the *narratives,* and *narrators*, themselves.

A few words about why. The reasons for this have something to do with the alternatives: On the one hand, we can insist on the sorts of precise narratives that Schechtman found to be identity constituting. On the other, we can simply declare that any narrative – especially any illness narrative – is identity constituting by virtue of being told through a wounded body, as per Arthur Frank. And while I have already explored some of the difficulties with Schechtman's view, I have not yet considered Frank's epistemically vague, any-narrative-is-a-good-narrative approach. I now turn to a consideration of his claims.

I. Arthur Frank and the Uncontested Illness Narrative

"Stories," Arthur Frank tells us in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body Illness, and Ethics*, "repair the damage that illness has done to the ill person's sense of where she is in life and where she is going."[291] To illustrate, he offers the story of a woman who, although declared medically "cured" after a cerebral aneurysm, still suffered bouts of double vision and certain kinds of muscular asymmetries. Significantly, her stroke constituted a large and important part of her new identity, even after the treatment was deemed successful. And only by telling her story, whatever sort of story it is – and by having it heard – could her recovery proceed beyond its clinical boundaries.

Serious illness, as I have noted and as Frank argues, *calls* for stories. The shock of the interruption of one's life, the loss of one's trajectory (or trajectories), as well as the brute physical and psychological assault of the illness experience turns us into what Ronald Dworkin has called a "narrative wreck."[292] Or, as Frank notes,

> Judith Zaruches's metaphor of losing her map and destination suggests illness as a shipwreck. Almost every illness story I have read carries some sense of being shipwrecked by the storm of disease, and many use this metaphor explicitly. Extending this metaphor describes storytelling as repair work on the wreck.[293]

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[291]Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 53.

[292]Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom*, (New York: Knopf, 1993) 211.

[293]Frank 54.

These "repairs" are constituted by first "taking stock of what survives the storm," and then by "forming" the new self through "what is told"[294] – through the telling of the stories about the self, or what Roy Schafer calls "self-stories."[295] Frank takes this act of telling one's story to be a dual one: One is first telling the story to others, but also to oneself: to others, to reaffirm one's relationships and worth with those who are there to witness the telling , and to oneself, to reestablish one's own existence *as a self with a story*:

> Audre Lorde's expression of her need to write after her surgery for breast cancer begins, "In order to keep me available to myself..." Illness is a crisis of self in the specific sense of an uncertainty that one's self is still there as an audience; the reaffirmation of this self as "available" is crucial.[296]

According to Frank, this reaffirmation ought to be directed at several goals that he takes to be central in storytelling: First, he calls for the kind of story that would create a "sense of coherence" between the past, present, and future, and thus place the illness experience in the context of time and memory.[297] Second, he calls for a "good (illness) story," where such a story is just "the act of witness that says, implicitly or explicitly, "I will tell you not what you want to hear but what I know to be true because I have lived it. This truth will trouble you, but in the end, you cannot be free without it because you know it

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[294] Frank 55.

[295] Frank 55.

[296] Frank 56.

[297] Frank 61.

already; your body knows it already."[298] Third, he calls on us to reclaim "the capacity for wonder....at all the self can be" from the "bureaucratic rationalizations of institutional medicine."[299] In short, an illness narrative can be a way to rescue the act of one's identity-creation from the oppressive and alienating environment of the biomedical establishment and allow one to, once again, begin the process of self-creation. He classifies these illness narratives into three types as organizing and "listening devices" for the witnesses. This tripartite division, Frank suggested, serves as a way in to the normative theory and practice of illness narratives[300]. Although I will not address his narrative taxonomy here, I mention it in order to emphasize a curious comment that Frank makes regarding how we are to approach all of these narratives. He claims that

> If calling stories true requires some category of stories called false, I confess to being unsure what a "false" personal account would be. I have read personal accounts I considered evasive, but that evasion *was* their truth. The more reconstructed the story, the more powerful the truth of the *desire* for what is being told, as the corrected version of what was lived. Hearing the desire in the story takes me back to the need for a different level of attention to stories.[301]

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[298] Frank 63.

[299] Frank 68.

[300] These narratives include the restitution narrative, the chaos narrative, and the quest narrative, although Frank noted that other kinds of narratives can certainly exist, as well.

[301] Frank 22.

Although Frank notes a number of times the role of hearing the story – that is, the second, and third-person standpoints of those who witness the narrative act – his primary focus is on the telling of a story *as a moral act.* The normative force of storytelling, he suggests, comes from the consequences of "thinking with stories": He calls on the listener, whether medical personnel, friend, or family, to "think with stories" – to "join with them; allowing one's own thoughts to adopt the story's immanent logic....The goal is empathy...."resonance" with the other....What the story teaches is that there is always another story....Thinking with stories means that narrative ethics cannot offer people clear guidelines or principles for making decisions. Instead, what is offered is permission to *allow the story to lead in certain directions.*"[302] And thus the illness narrative "presents who the ill person has become and stakes a public claim on this new identity....Just as the experiences that the narratives tell had to be made public, so the narratives themselves should be retold."[303]

So, what kind of picture of narrative does Frank offer? Although I do not engage with his claims in great detail in this dissertation, we can still distinguish several central ideas:

1. Any illness story that has as its source the suffering body of the narrator is a good story, and ought to be given uptake by its witnesses.
2. There is no such thing as "untrue" illness stories.

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[302] Frank 158-160.

[303] Arthur W. Frank, "The Rhetoric of Self-Change: Illness Experience as Narrative," *Sociological Quarterly*, 34.1 (1993): 42-49.

3. The role of the listener is somewhat passive: the speaker must be allowed to speak the "truth" of the ill body.
4. Storytelling teaches us about our connections to each other, and the responsibilities for our selves and for each other that these connections engender.
5. By allowing the storyteller to reclaim himself or herself both from the medical establishment as well as, to the extent possible, from the identity-destroying power of illness, identity-constituting stories empower the storyteller.

If we add to this epistemically, conceptually, morally, and in a number of other ways vague conception of illness narratives the poetic freedom of narrative self-invention – say, of the kind advocated by Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – our personal story choices and descriptions of the truth within an otherwise normatively neutral language-game are simply that: the stories that we are moved, for our own reasons, to tell as a result of our specific circumstances.

Such relatively unconstrained storytelling is at the center of Rorty's theorizing. His was a call for a personal and social freedom from non-contingent philosophical (as well as scientific, and other) rules, and a turn toward an understanding of the utter contingency of our web of beliefs that would at the same time bring with it a respect for justice. He tells us that the things and ideas that we take to be important are not so *a priori*, or because they are the products of a great philosophical insight, or because they are the results of a carefully-crafted deductive argument: they are so because, given our various contexts, events, inclinations, and so on, *we say they are*. Thus, our "final vocabularies," in Rorty's terms – our

sets of beliefs which we tend to hold as more or less fundamental to our views of ourselves and of the world – ought not be expressed though another's narratives, and ought always be open to revision. But revision and contextualization *by the ironist narrator himself or herself*, with the full understanding of the important difference between being created by one's own contingent story and being created by the contingent story of another (which might mistakenly be viewed as definitive or final).[304] And it is only through our acceptance of this contingency of knowledge – and indeed, of ourselves – that we can take up the liberal, ironist task of remaking *ourselves for ourselves* – of constantly perfecting our own stories without regard to external, universal, (or theoretical-juridical) ideals. Indeed, Rorty tells us that he intends to create

> a single vision [that will] let us hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity....the aim of a just and free society [is] letting its citizens be as privatistic, irrationalist, and aesthetiscist as they please.[305]

Perhaps in part following J. S. Mill's "suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and

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[304] The ironist holds the following beliefs:

(1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself.

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 73.

[305] Rorty xiv.

preventing suffering,"[306] this "vision" is grounded in the possibility of a new type of liberal society, involving a realization of our personal and social contingency. The "liberal ironists" who inhabit these historically contingent societies are individuals who

> reconcile themselves to a private-public split within their final vocabularies, to the fact that resolution of doubts about one's final vocabulary has nothing to do with attempts to save other people from pain and humiliation. . . . We should stop trying to combine self-creation and politics, especially if we are liberals. The part of a liberal ironist's final vocabulary which has to do with public action is never going to get subsumed under, or subsume, the rest of her final vocabulary.[307]

This, then, makes possible a simultaneous process of engaging in private self-invention as well as in a public search for justice and solidarity. Liberal ironism, therefore, is grounded in a public-private split , with "ironism" suggesting the "private" aspect of our self-invention, and "liberal" indicating the "public" task of the elimination, or at least the minimization of, cruelty. Specifically, the public part of the split is grounded in the idea

> that cruelty is the worst thing we do....The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange.[308]

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[306] Rorty 63.

[307] Rorty 120.

[308] Rorty xiv-xv.

The public sphere, therefore, serves as a check on the freedoms of the aesthetic self-creation that defines the private one: In public – or, more precisely, in cases where individuals other than myself might be affected by my actions and definitions – the task of the liberal ironist is to create the kinds of institutions and practices that minimize cruelty and encourage freedom.

In the private sphere, the ironist self that is created through a narrative, even if perhaps not "unshared" in the way Rorty envisioned, is nevertheless "private [and] unsuited to argument,"[309] where by "argument" I mean a challenge to a given narrative based on its form, style, or content. Such a self acknowledges that any idea, theory, or identity can be changed simply by being redescribed and that, in the end, there is no final criteria among our vocabularies – indeed, the language that we speak is always "up for grabs." This self is also aware that it itself is not immune to a constant renaming and re-forming through its own forever-changing vocabulary. Our ironist identities, therefore, are never finished – and especially not through a particularly compelling grand narrative – "because there is nothing to complete, there is only a web of relations to be rewoven, a web which time lengthens every day."[310]

What this view of aesthetic storytelling – and thus of meaning-making – suggests is that no self-definition, regardless of the source, contains within it any *a priori* (or indeed, *a posteriori*) epistemic privilege: all methods of self-expression are just aesthetic creations that serve to remind of the "final victory of poetry in its ancient quarrel with philosophy–the final victory of metaphors of self-creation over metaphors of discovery."[311] Truth, therefore,

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[309] Rorty xiv.

[310] Rorty 43.

[311] Rorty 40.

is what we *make* – not what we *find* – through our various descriptions and redescriptions of the world (the possibilities for which are enriched and enlarged through the different vocabularies we learn from reading works that serve as aesthetic and moral advisors) and is, at its core, wholly dependent on the contingency of our language. In a Wittgenstinian move, Rorty suggests that how we experience this truth is, importantly, a function of our words, our vocabulary – of our stories. What we claim to know, therefore, is mediated by how we *talk* about it.

At first glance, this any-story-is-a-good-story approach sounds plausible, and in, fact, quite attractive. Indeed, if we take Frank's optimism about the efficacy of stories and storytellers, and combine it with Rorty's argument about the private self-invention of the ironist, we have the sort of narrator-witness relationship that requires not only tolerance for any sort of identity-constituting illness story, but also blocks the objection that it does not track anything external to itself. Identity, therefore, becomes an act of "self creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home....thinking up some new metaphors."[312] Every story counts no more and no less than another based on an external (to the teller) criterion of verification.

But this picture should worry us quite a bit. On the one hand, the Frank-Rorty view seems to rightly reject Schechtman's constraints on the sorts of narratives that are identity-constituting. On the other, its emphasis on self-invention begins to sound just a little suspect when set against the backdrop of physical and psychological havoc that deep illness

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[312] Rorty 27.

Here, I do not address in any detail either Rorty's claims about the difference of the private and public sphere of stories or that we develop our ironist vocabulary by reading certain works, and then using it as a guide to refine and restructure our own descriptive narrative abilities.

can create – anything from an "ontological assault"[313] that throws our most basic assumptions about our lives and ourselves into chaos, to "biographical disruption"[314] that interrupts the life stories we thought we were living, to a wholesale dissolution of the "building blocks of the perceived world,"[315] including such things as language, time, and space. Specifically, if any illness story is a good story, as per Frank, and if we can indeed exercise the kind of complete self-invention in the private sphere, as per Rorty, then we, at least in Frank's case, have a world where we ought to be not only unable, but unwilling, to constrain any illness narrative. I will say more about why I take this to be a worry not only for Frank, but for illness narratives in general in the next section when I address such narratives in greater detail.

For now, I note that Rorty's two moves – first, the private-public split, and second, his emphasis on unconstrained self-invention in the private sphere – leave us in a troubling place indeed. The public-private schism suggests that, although there are connections between the two spheres in the sense that one who is an ironist privately is also a liberal publicly, the two involve fundamentally different pursuits: self-invention and justice through

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[313] Janoff-Bulman, R., *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Kleinman, A., *The illness narratives: Suffering, healing and the human condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Taylor, S., *Positive illusions: Creative self-deception and the healthy mind*, New York: Basic Books, 1989).

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

[314] Brody, Howard, *Stories of sickness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Bury, M., "Chronic illness: A biographical disruption," *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 4.2, (1982): 167–182; Yardley, L., ed., *Material discourses of health and illness.* (London: Routledge, 1997).

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

[315] Byron J. Good, "A body in pain: The making of a world of chronic pain," *Pain as human experience: An anthropological perspective*, eds., M. Delvecchio-Good, P. Brodwin, B. Good, and A. Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 42.

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

the elimination of cruelty. While it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer anything like an exhaustive treatment of Rorty's theories, I do nevertheless believe that the public/private spilt that he puts forth does not reflect the *private and public* nature of illness – and especially deep illness. Indeed, while the experience of illness – the suffering, grief, frustration, and myriad other feelings and sensations that such an event usually elicits – can be quite private, even oppressively so, the larger experience of, say, a patient in a hospital, or in the family, or even in one's own home where one requires assistance in one's daily tasks, is at least arguably public. Thus, given that deep illness seems to be public and private at the same time, Rorty's schism either (1) is designed solely for those who are not ill, and thus are somehow able to separate their experiences and activities into the private and public, or, more likely, (2) is, at least to some extent, misguided. I say that (2) is more likely because, given the prevalence of serious illness (not to mention the illness that comes with age, poverty, and so on), it would seem odd if Rorty's concern for self-invention and the prevention of cruelty only extended to those who were not also burdened by illness. Indeed, if the tasks that would both liberate us internally and externally were only within the grasp of the healthiest and most able among us, I would argue that his goal of the prevention of cruelty would at the very least be threatened as a result of its narrow focus.

Rorty's second move – his emphasis on self-invention – also gives us a reason to worry when viewed in the context of deep illness. If there are indeed no definitive "final vocabularies" and therefore no stories that are "better" than those told by someone else (or in fact by the narrators at a different time), then it would seem that we might inhabit the sort of universe where if I chose, I could narrate myself into a diminished, perhaps even debased, existence.

I could tell the sort of story about myself that describes me as unworthy of good treatment, attention, or love. I could invent a self that took private cruel treatment to be the norm. I could create an identity that is known only to the extent that it is unwanted, disgusting, weak, or insane. In Rorty's world of the liberal ironist, I could do all of this, and more, as long as my self-inventions are private. Yet given the difficulties with the public-private division that I discuss above, as well as some of the consequences noted here, I take Rorty's emphasis on self-invention to be troubling both because of what it makes possible and of what it proscribes: It makes possible a destruction of one's identity as a being who is a part of the moral universe through one's stories about the self, and it forbids any external limits on the contents of these narratives. The result, rather than Rorty's private liberation of ironist aesthetic freedom, is the possibility of the undoing of the self. And given the special difficulties presented by deep illness, such conflation of aesthetics and morality can indeed unmake our identities, and thus, to an important degree, our world.

To wit, when diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer at the age of thirty-one, Anne Dennison recalled that "suddenly....the axe had fallen. Gone forever....Everything [was] gone all at once. . . . I was obsessed by the waste of it all . . . I regretted all the effort, all the sacrifices directed towards a future which wasn't going to happen. . . ."[316] Frank himself recalled the instant he was told by his physician that his cardiogram indicated the fact of his heart attack by noting that while the doctor "seemed uncertain of the medical details....I hardly heard him; I was lost in a sense of sudden and profound change. In the moments of

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[316] Anne Dennison, *Uncertain Journey: A Woman's Experience Of Living With Cancer* (Newmill: Patten Press, 1996) 1–5.

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

that call I became a different person."[317] Similarly, Musa Mayer recalled how her experience with cancer remade her identity into that of "an émigré to another, darker country, trying to sort out what my new identity means....[having] entered another world [and] forced to survive in a hostile new landscape, fraught with dangers [where] the ordinary events of my life had abruptly become irrelevant. None of the ingredients of my former identity counted here."[318]

Uncontroversially, therefore, when deeply ill, we suffer. This suffering is, of course, not just physical (as if the physical pain of serious illness were not sufficient in itself!) – we suffer due to what we perceive as the undoing of our identities. And to the extent that identities are thus damaged, and given the numerous ways in which they are damaged, I agree with Frank that we ought to be generous in our assessment of identity-reconstituting narratives (and with Rorty that identity creation is, to some degree, an aesthetic act), and in fact I take their more expansive view of what narratives "count" to be somewhat preferable to Schechtman's limiting emphasis on particular narrative shape, style, and structure. But my agreement with their views goes only so far. Here is where it ends and where my own (albeit tentative) view of what illness narratives are and what they ought to do begins.

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[317] Arthur Frank, *At The Will Of The Body* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991) 9.

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

[318] Musa Mayer, *Examining Myself: One Woman's Story of Breast Cancer Treatment And Recovery* (Winchester: Faber & Faber, 1994) 23.

See also Crossley, Michele L., "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10.4 (2000): 527–546.

II. Stories of Illness as Meaning-Making: The Possibility of Constrained Illness Narratives

a. The Uniqueness of the Illness Narrative: A Few Clarifications

As I have argued earlier in this dissertation, our identity-constituting narratives constitute our identities precisely because they serve as representations of who we are to ourselves and to the world, and thus designate us as specific kinds of entities, marked for certain sorts of treatments, freedoms, and roles. I have also noted that this "marking" becomes that much more important when the narrator is one damaged by serious illness. What this means is that when we are very sick, what we say about who we think we are, and how what we say is received, becomes even more a matter of not just situating ourselves within a wider social fabric of others trying to similarly situate themselves, but of struggling to be heard while weighed down by the physically limiting and psychologically isolating burden of illness. This, of course, is not to say that being burdened by illness is the only sort of difficulty we might have in speaking and being heard: we could be otherwise constrained by gender, race, disability, age, religion, and so on. However, it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss all the ways in which our moral agency can be impaired as a result of threats to the process of the constitution of our individual identities. I will content myself with examining the kinds of challenges that serious illness tends to present.

These challenges are on the one hand unique to deep illness, and on the other may possess a family resemblance to a number of experiences perhaps best described as a "shock to the system." I begin with a brief discussion of the potential resemblances.

Deep illness – the kind that I address here – can be terminal, chronic, or both. Unlike an inherited trait or a congenital abnormality, it is not something into which one is born, but emerges as a fact of one's life, in the middle of one's ongoing life narrative. It is also unlike long-term conditions, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, athlete's foot, or acne, for although undoubtedly difficult, painful, and unwelcome, none of them (usually) has the potential to annihilate and remain an always-present part of one's identity for the rest of one's life. And it also can be distinct from accidental trauma, for illness suggests the sort of internal betrayal by one's body not necessarily implied by the externally-caused accident.

But deep illness does indeed share the traits of "othering," shock, and isolation with a number of traumatic events in our lives. For example, gender, race, religion, national origin, or other features might designate us as "other," and thus perhaps as unwanted. Thus, an immigrant who does not know the local language and does not understand the culture feels marked for exclusion, or a woman in an office whose staff consists entirely of men senses her otherness and subsequent alienation. Similarly, a cancer patient, weakened and exhausted by chemotherapy and hiding her hair loss under a hat feels like she does not quite belong in a brightly lit mall, shopping with her non-ill friends for summer clothes – she is not the "norm," she does not "belong."

Moreover, the suddenness and unexpected pain of (some) divorces can produce a shock to one's system that is quite devastating to one's identity. Indeed, the experience can be so sharp and so surprisingly painful that its effects on the stability of one's identity can rival the effect of the shock of an initial diagnosis of a devastating disease.

Finally, isolation is not something that is unique to deep illness. We can be isolated, and thus our identities can be affected by, such events as unemployment, sudden poverty, or even a lack of medical insurance. Just as an ill person might conceive of himself or herself as

being 'on the outside, looking in," so might someone who was previously gainfully employed and is presently excluded not only from the social world that his job provided, but also for the economic security and personal satisfaction that came with it.

And yet, I suggest that, despite some family resemblance, deep illness is nevertheless qualitatively different from other sorts of devastating or identity-changing experiences. Importantly, when I say "different," I do not mean that serious illness is so distinct from others kinds of experience as to merit its own experiential universe and vocabulary, but I do suggest that it is sufficiently unique to call for its own account. The reasons for this are three identity-altering characteristics that seem to be unique to deep illness.

First, there is the difference in *the relationship to time*. Unlike other potentially identity-changing events like divorce, serious illness is not an event – it is a lifelong process. That is, once a diagnosis has been made, the patient has to live with its consequences (and possibly worsening symptoms) for the rest of his or her life. This is not to say that divorce cannot impact one in a way that is lifelong – the difference is that while the divorced person might be touched by the divorce (and all that led up to it) for the rest of his or her life, it might be possible to move beyond its identity-changing effects. However, the terminal or chronic patient has no such option– the illness is there, every day, and even if our mind tries to move beyond it, the suffering body is there to remind us of the disease's inevitable, and inescapable, reality. Given this difference, I suggest that the way in which deep illness can alter our identity, while sharing some common ground with events like divorce, is unique in its complete claim on our time, both current and future. It *never* goes away.

Second, unlike other identity-changing events, deep illness is a kind of an *internally-forced migration* from the world of the relatively healthy to the world of the ill. What I mean is this: Illness has the potential of quite literally placing me in the shoes of someone I might

never have imagined myself to be. We can of course imagine ourselves ill, just as we might picture ourselves divorced, or poor, or even as an outcast in an unfamiliar world. The difference, however, is that divorce, poverty, one's "outcast" status, and even violent events, such as rape, have their source in an external, potentially oppressive violence toward us by others or by economic and social systems. Our identities are changed because abusive *outside force* has been applied. In the case of serious illness, however, the movement is from the inside out: it is our very body that seems to attack us, or fail us, or deceive us, and thus the sort of "migration" that we make from trusting our bodies to a collapse of confidence in them changes our identity not merely in the ways we relate to the world, but significantly, in the ways that we relate to our own embodiment, to ourselves. As Howard Brody notes, deep illness can mean "disconnectedness and disruption, in which the self is cut off from social meaning and social support and experiences itself as divided from the body."[319]

Third (and somewhat related to my second claim), I suggest that serious illness can be potentially identity-altering due primarily to *the forced vulnerability* that it produces in the part of the patient. I say "forced" because the kind of deep illness that I am considering here makes itself known in the course of one's life, rather than at birth or as a part of a pre-existing condition – it forces one out of the semi-independent state in which most of us exist, and into partial, and sometimes total, dependency (and thus vulnerability), often for the rest of one's life. This kind of vulnerability is qualitatively different from either external oppression, for we can be vulnerable due to causes that have nothing to do with oppression, or from other kinds of violent upheavals that can disrupt our lives, for these disruptions can wreak havoc without necessarily making us vulnerable and dependent. For example, someone with advanced Multiple Sclerosis might require the help of his or her family with

[319] Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 133.

certain daily tasks, thus exposing his or her vulnerability while not necessarily at the same time suggesting oppression (although, unfortunately, oppressive care environments do, unfortunately, too often exist). Moreover, someone who has experienced the upheaval of war might indeed experience changes in his or her identity without also becoming more vulnerable as a result.

Generally, my point is this: although deep illness is not unique in that it can change our identities, the way that it changes them can sometimes differ from other identity-altering events. The sort of disorienting, destabilizing shock-to-the-system that the onset of such an illness presents, I suggest (and have suggested), calls for stories, and for the analysis of these stories as a special problem for identity-constituting narratives. The differences in a deeply ill individual's relationship to time, his or her internally-forced migration, as well as a forced vulnerability suggest that the damage serious illness potentially inflicts on identity-constituting narratives is serious, normatively critical, and worthy of distinct careful and *distinct* consideration. Specifically, the kind of consideration that has to do with the question of narrative constraint, or the worry about which narratives ought to be encouraged and granted uptake.

But what this consideration means, and how we view illness narratives is quite clearly not a settled matter. As I have noted above, I part company with what I take to be an uncritical embracing of any and all narratives (as per Rorty) or illness narratives (as per Frank). The rest of this section will be dedicated to explaining what I take to be a better – that is, a more theoretically and practically fruitful – direction, and why.

b. Illness Narratives Reconsidered

Perhaps the simplest way to begin is to say that illness narratives *are* just potential identity-constituting narratives told by us about our world when we are ill. The crucial part of this definition, however, is "potential": The dangerous question to ask is why some of these narratives ought to be accepted as identity-constituting, while some others might be more properly viewed as expressions and statements of the narrator that might very well have some other value for the speaker and the witness, but which ought not be considered central to the narrative that weaves together a picture of who we (and others) take ourselves to be. I say "dangerous" because with any pronouncement about how things ought to be – that is, with any claim that is at least on some level normative – comes the unspoken thought (1). that things ought not remain as they are, and (more controversially) (2). that the speaker *knows better.* I make no such claim of any epistemic privilege. Instead, I invite the reader to consider some of the possible goals that might make sense in light of one being confronted by deep illness, and then follow me in trying to formulate tentative criteria for narrative uptake. In order to make my point more concretely (and thus less abstractly), I will turn to the story of the struggles of a particular elderly woman, in the grip of a very serious (and eventually fatal) illness.[320] For the purposes of this dissertation, I will call her Mrs. P.

Born and having lived most of her life in the Soviet Union, Mrs. P was a fiercely independent and proud woman. Having lost her husband in the Second World War while pregnant with his child, she never remarried, and raised a daughter by herself while at the same time holding down a job and taking care of her ailing parents – a brazen and willful act that was viewed with suspicion by her more traditional neighbors and friends. After her

[320] I note that despite certain memory and other cognitive problems, she was ill neither with Alzheimer's Disease nor (until the very last few weeks of her life) with dementia.

granddaughter, Sasha, was born, she dedicated every summer to her growth and development, teaching her, among other things, that fear can usually be overcome and that patience has its own virtues, until they both departed for America. When her daughter's family fled to the United States in the mid 1908s, Mrs. P., already in her 60s, followed them on her own. Upon arrival in the United States, Mrs. P. wasted very little time adjusting to her new environment, and, although first living with her daughter's family before moving out into her own apartment, once again took charge of Sasha, as well as helping with the care of her son-in-law's blind mother. To the best of her ability, she learned English and passed the citizenship exam. She traveled alone and with friends. Apart from her remaining brothers, she was often lonely but not overwhelmed by sadness: after all, she always noted, she had her memories, her friends, her family, her own apartment.

When Mrs. P. became ill, it was not very obvious at first: a few infections, some minor surgeries, some new medications, some problems remembering names and places. But later, about a year before her death, although she could still do some things for herself, she began to require daily care, mostly refused to take care of herself physically (although still retaining some ability to do so), refused to go for walks, and generally withdrew, often avoiding even her favorite activities of reading, watching old movies, and talking on the phone with her granddaughter. She became impatient and easily frustrated, repeating "I cannot," "I will not," "I am afraid," "It does not matter," "Leave me alone," and "I want to be alone" to most suggestions. And although her memory was often failing her, she gave up trying to remember even the most basic things, like names of those to whom she was speaking, but perhaps most devastatingly, she began to dissociate from her memories of her husband, her daughter's childhood, her home back in Russia. She withdrew from her clubs, activities, and friends, frustrating all those who questioned her actions by claiming that "I

never cared for _____ anyway," or, with time, "Why would anyone want to have anything to do with a stupid old woman like me?" In response to questions about her pre-immigration life, she would just wave her hand and say "Does not matter now....nothing matters now." In the few weeks before she died, she fell almost totally silent, refusing to speak or even to look at the people in front of her.

First, a few clarificatory words about this story. A part of my motivation for addressing the question of which narratives ought to receive uptake is rooted in what I perceive to be fundamental errors made by Mrs. P.'s medical staff and her family during the course of her illness. But of course I intend that my situation-specific observations here are much more generalizeable, and suggest that my use of this particular story is only a means, and not an end, of entering the conversation.

So what went wrong? Mrs. P.'s family, as well as the medical staff, listened to her narratives – in fact, listened to them quite a bit. They connected with her suffering in the way Frank suggested they ought, and they let her express her frustration and pain at her increasing lack of freedom and mobility. She spoke what she took to be her truth through her wounded body. Her physicians were sensitive to her experience of illness (rather than just relying on the clinical language of disease), and treated her gently and kindly, thus precluding most standard bioethical objections about a removed, unavailable, or emotionally bankrupt medical establishment.

The problem instead was the publicly-observed (and tacitly approved) destruction of Mrs. P.'s identity. Until her last days, Mrs. P. was given the freedom to narrate herself into a corner. Her narrative, and the sort of identity that it created, painted a picture of a self which was not only unable to engage with others, but was hostile, isolated, but also (especially in the eyes of those who did not already know her) unworthy of engagement.

And those who were responsible for the care – indeed, those who *loved* her – stood by and *did nothing*, thereby allowing her to narrate herself out of existence. By this, I mean that she convinced herself – and, by their silence, might have taken herself to have convinced most of those who cared for her – that she was simply no longer the moral agent that she once was, and that the sort of being she was becoming was physically, psychologically, and thus *morally*, defective and not worth anyone's time, including her own. The tragedy, therefore, was not just that she died – it was *how* she died, and what *preceded* her death. Not only did her narrative become a reflection of her view of herself as ultimately unworthy and beyond repair, but those who surrounded her, through their silence – that is, through their lack of counternarratives or any attempts to constrain her narrative – echoed her stories, even if unwittingly. And it is one thing, it seems to me, to deliberately leave – to write, or narrate, oneself out of existence. An individual might, for a number of reasons, believe that her life is effectively over, and that what is required is the kind of detachment that not only physically, but psychologically and narratively, separates her from life as she had known it. It is quite another for that individual to give in to perceived abandonment. And it makes all the difference in the world whether we, as witnesses, leave an individual to do what she takes to be the right thing for her after a careful consideration of her history, her personality, her life, or whether we abandon her through silence and an inability (or perhaps a reluctance) to challenge, and to engage with, a narrative that seems to have gone terribly wrong.

The conclusion of Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* offers a compelling example of what I mean by "leaving" versus "abandonment.": As Ivan is about to die,

> suddenly it grew clear to him that what had been oppressing him and would not leave his was all dropping away at once from two sides, from ten sides,

and from all sides. He was sorry for them, he must act so as not to hurt them: release them and free himself from these sufferings. "How good and how simple!" he thought. "And the pain?" he asked himself. "What has become of it? Where are you, pain?"

He turned his attention to it.

"Yes, here it is. Well, what of it? Let the pain be."

"And death...where is it?"

He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it. "Where is it? What death?" There was no fear because there was no death.

In place of death there was light.

"So that's what it is!" he suddenly exclaimed aloud. "What joy!"[321]

Thus, after fighting death and holding on to life for as long as he possibly could, Ivan was ready to *leave*, he was ready to face whatever it is that awaited him beyond the pain, beyond the illness. His desire to "free himself from these sufferings" was grounded in a combination of epiphany and through-through understanding of his circumstances. This deliberate, conscious leave-taking is markedly different from unmediated Mrs. P.'s drifting into a narrative of insignificance and uselessness. Ivan Ilyich's act of leaving becomes her narrative slide into *witnessed* abandonment.

Given the number of people in her position (or worse) now and in the future, it seems to me that we can both support a narrative conception of identity and still *do better* as theorists and practitioners of all that such an approach implies. I suggest that "doing better"

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[321] Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Chapter XII, The Classical Library, 3 July 2007 <http://www.classicallibrary.org/tolstoy/ivan/index.htm>.

requires that we reevaluate how we approach identity-constituting narratives and what we can reasonably expect of them – that we navigate a middle ground between a theoretical-juridical approach to understanding identity and Frank's narrative relativism.

c. Which Illness Narratives? A Tentative Sketch

That simply taking any narrative to be morally justified simply by virtue of being an illness narrative seems at best naïve and at worst harmful to both the narrator and his or her witnesses. Thus, the question to which we now must turn seems to have something to do with justification – *normative* justification. How do we determine which illness narratives are to be preferred over others, and what criteria do we turn to in order to support our conclusions?

Recall that throughout this dissertation, I have argued that identity creation, maintenance, and re-creation is distinctly *moral work* because our identities mark us as particular sorts of moral agents in the world. I now suggest that this moral work extends from how our identities are put together to deciding *whether* and *how* to constrain the narratives that constitute these identities.

i. Whether to Constrain Narratives

I take the question of *whether* they ought to be constrained to be a clearer one, for it seems that without any sort of constraints, we might passively endorse fantastical, damaging, misleading, or just plain false narratives as identity-constituting. Take the obvious examples of someone who is in the later stages of a fatal disease, yet insists that he or she will be

"cured" and will be well enough to go to Hawaii with his or her family next year. Or the patient who is in denial about a diagnosis, claiming that it just cannot be. Or one who is claiming that "people like me" simply do not get "diseases like this."

But, as I noted these are the easy cases, unacceptable as identity-constituting narratives because they violate the most basic criteria for epistemic evaluation: they are not consistent with the data or are, to some degree, incoherent.[322] A more complex case is that of Mrs. P., who makes no data-denying claims about being ill, or incoherent pronouncements about the certainty of "getting better." Indeed, she seemingly embraces her condition in all of its grim reality and its inevitability. The problem with her narratives is that they lack what Hilde Lindemann calls *strong explanatory force, correlation to action*, and *heft*.[323]

Although I take Lindemann's intention to be to spell out some basic constraining conditions for identity-constituting narratives, I think that her success is grounded in also setting out some reasons for *whether* narratives ought to be constrained by means other than those set out for Schechtman, among others. Because identity-constituting narratives are very particular kinds of stories, Lindemann correctly tells us, they ought to be constrained in ways that take account of, but also expand on, the sort of standard epistemic criteria I noted above. Thus, identity-constituting narratives ought to have a strong explanatory force because they "don't just take the evidence into account – they're the ones that fit the evidence best."[324] What this means is that in Mrs. P.'s case, some of the illness stories, both those she tells about herself and those that others ended up telling about her, have to be

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[322] I will not consider here the question of whether all fantastical narratives are necessarily harmful, or even untrue. I will also save for another time the discussion about the possible psychological benefits of some fantastical or data-contradicting narratives.

[323] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 92-99.

[324] Nelson 93.

discounted, given her history, her character, and her behavior throughout her pre-illness life: either her life-long optimism, the people and activities that she cares about, and her general attitude that it matters what we do with our lives constitute who she is, or her rejection of it all, as well as others' view of her as a difficult and bad-tempered old woman does. We can, of course, suggest that perhaps she is a little of both, but we have to be very careful to make sure that we assign the proper weight to all of these stories. If, for example, Mrs. P.'s narrative about caring about her family is consistent and life-long, her current narrative of detachment might reasonably be granted less credibility, and thus might be taken to be a lesser component of her identity. People certainly change – and what matters to them changes, as well – but in cases where stories are contradictory, or at least radically different, we have to, as Lindemann notes, pay careful attention and try to determine which stories carry the stronger explanatory force. Thus, the question of whether to constrain narratives is addressed here in no uncertain terms: Given that narratives will conflict, some of them will have to be constrained as identity-constituting ones. Otherwise, our identities offer neither ourselves nor others any sort of coherent explanation as to who we take ourselves to be.

Lindemann's second criterion, correlation to action, argues that we ought to constrain narratives because sometimes there is very little relationship between what we say and what we do. Thus, in Mrs. P.'s case, her statements that she simply did not care whether she felt better or not – or about the trajectory of her illness – did not seem to correspond very well with her meticulous following of the physician's orders, including taking her medication on time and carefully keeping her appointments with him. Given that her actions, as Lindemann points out, "speak louder than....words,"[325] we should be able to say that what she says does not explain what she does, or why she does it. Even if the

[325] Nelson 95.

correlation is found lacking in a reverse manner – say, we decide that the words actually represent the narrator more accurately than her actions for reasons such as duress, a lack of certain capacities to act, and so on – the correlation to action criterion still provides us with a reason to examine narratives, whether acted out or spoken, that appear to somehow not fit or contradict each other. And while it is probably unreasonable to look for a perfect fit between actions and words in the life story of any human being, when the lack of such fit becomes egregious, we might very well have a reason to constrain a given narrative by referring to its correlation to the narrator's actions.

Finally, Lindemann's third criterion, heft, proposes that "identity-constituting narratives are woven around the features of people's lives that they, or some of the rest of us, care about most."[326] We ought to constrain some narratives, therefore, because some stories (either from a first-person or a third-person perspective) may fail to capture what is central to being *me*. (Say, I might insist that I would not be really me if, as a vegetarian and an animal-rights activist, I suddenly began to eat red meat and to support hunting for sport). Both first and third-person perspectives matter because we ought not necessarily exclude narrative for the sole reason that a narrator cares very little for its content, just as we ought not necessarily include it for the reason that third parties take it to be important. Thus, just because Mrs. P. seems to care very little for her memories of her husband during her illness is not a reason to take her memory-denying narrative as identity-constituting. After all, during her whole life, her memories of him were very much a part of who she was. And merely because the new nurse in the hospital assumes that because Mrs. P.'s paperwork says "national origin: U.S.S.R." she is unable to communicate in English and thus does not

[326] Nelson 96.

engage her in any way is not a reason to take that nurse's narrative about Mrs. P. as identity-constituting, either. What matters – and why constraining narratives is moral work in itself – is that we try to form as accurate a picture as we can of who the narrator is for both her sake as well as for those who encounter her. And this work, Lindemann correctly notes, is quite different from "art" or "the pursuit of aesthetic or self-serving or political ends."[327] It is quite different, therefore, from the kind of creative self-invention advocated by Rorty or the liberation-through-narrative relativism of Frank. This difference is not merely teleological – it is grounded in Lindemann's insistence that constraining the narratives that are to be identity-constituting is part and parcel of the moral work of identity creation and re-creation. And as Mrs. P.'s case suggests, such careful discernment is especially apropos in the case of deep illness.

To Lindemann's criteria for why we ought to constrain narratives, I add two more reasons that are related, yet distinct. First, we must constrain narratives because *contexts* both matter and change. And this ought not be too surprising – after all, we might very well be different people when we are in formal work settings then when we are relaxed with our friends, or when we address large crowds in auditoriums rather than small groups in more intimate settings. The context of our interactions, the power relations and differentials that a given context might suggest, and our sense of our own position all play a role in the kinds of identity-constituting stories that we might find ourselves telling and hearing. This context-dependency becomes even more pronounced and morally significant in cases of deep illness, where the context has dramatically shifted for the ill individual: As Mrs. P.'s case has demonstrated, the deeply ill patient has to be *seen and understood* in her new context as an ill patient, and the failure to grasp the significance of this changed context by others – her

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[327] Nelson 98-99.

new and potentially threatening surroundings, her depression, the burden of her illness – can lead to the kind of mute abandonment I described above. The understanding of the power that context can have, therefore, can very well prevent those who care for the seriously ill from expecting the kinds of behaviors and narratives that that have witnessed and heard pervious to the diagnosis. That is, a better *attunement* to context (and its effects) might lead to a better attunement to the narratives that are told in these contexts. As a result, these witnesses might more sensitively listen, and therefore constrain, the sorts of narratives that might be destructive, or false, or, as in Mrs. P.'s case, indicative of the growing self- and other-imposed abandonment. If seen, and understood, in her sudden distress, Mrs. P'.s process of dying might have been quite different indeed.

Second, narratives must be constrained because doing so is both *compassionate and just.* What I mean by "compassionate and just" is that it is simply unkind and unfair to take Mrs. P. at her word that she no longer cares for her husband, her daughter, her granddaughter, or her friends. Unkind, because to do so is to assume that she is in fact *just* the angry and reclusive woman that she appears to be in the current context of her illness, and unfair because such an assumption is simply not reasonable given the history of her beliefs and behaviors.

Note that by suggesting the wrongness of such assumptions and actions I am in no way arguing for a kind of an essentialism about identities – indeed, I am not claiming that in seeing Mrs. P. in such a negative light, we do not see the "real" Mrs. P. Instead, what I am suggesting is that seeing her *only* in this light shows a careless disregard for her *whole person*, with her history, her beliefs, and her memories, and reduces her to who she might be at one of the lowest, most difficult points in her life. And by not constraining her narratives that

neglect or even disparage this former, fuller, self, we diminish her not only in our eyes, but in her own.

One way to view my two additions to Lindemann's reasons for why we ought to contain narratives is that they build on, and extend, the credibility criteria by arguing that narratives that ignore context, compassion, or justice lack the necessary explanatory force, and therefore are good candidates for challenge. These narratives lack this force primarily because they do not take into account the storyteller as a whole person on the one hand, and the specific circumstances of his or her experience on the other. If we are serious about the claim that the narratives that become identity-constituting carry significant moral weight and therefore deserve careful evaluation, then it seems to me that the notion of credibility has to include considerations of not only the fact *that* a story is told by an ill individual, but also *how* it is told, and in which circumstances. But so far, we only have a tentative answer as to *why* we should constrain narratives. I now turn to several suggestions as to how to instantiate this "why."

ii. How to (Possibly) Constrain Narratives

Although it is essential to my task to make a case for *why* we ought to give uptake to some narratives and not others, the question of *how* to do so remains. I conclude this chapter, and indeed this dissertation, by offering some tentative suggestions that might point us in the direction of normative justification.

The question, then, is this: how do we know if the illness narratives that we wish to encourage as identity-constituting – where by "encourage" I mean take seriously, inquire about, retell, and so on – are the ones that merit such preferential treatment? The answers

that I offer have perhaps as much to do with my views on illness and dependency as with a desire for some measure of epistemological and moral certainty.

Our options seem few: (1). Develop a theoretical-juridical list of principles that each narrative ought to satisfy in some way in order to be identity-constituting; (2). Following Frank, among others, accept any and all narratives as potentially identity-constituting; or (3) Adopt a middle ground in our reasoning about illness narratives – what Aristotle called "for the most part" moral generalizations, and what Margaret Olivia Little saw as a possibility for moral justification in narrative ethics.[328] Having offered critiques of options (1) and (2) in earlier sections, I extend the possibility of this "middle ground" to illness narratives and suggest that (3) is a potential starting place for discourse about their status as moral claims.

As a step toward this middle ground, I begin with Margaret Little's argument for defeasible generalizations, which will help guide us in the subsequent analysis of narratives. The reason for introducing her views is that they create the space for the consideration of particular narratives, in all of their variety, contexts, and voices, as candidates for moral evaluation. And given the normative nature of our identities, I take it to be an essential task to also attempt to normatively ground the process of determining which narratives ought to be counted as identity-constituting, and why.

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[328] In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that, because ethics is the sort of subject matter that it is, it can only be stated "roughly and in outline," with its principles true only "for the most part" (1094b11-27).

The Internet Classics Archive, ed. Daniel C. Stevenson, October 2000, MIT, 3 July 2007 <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

Also see Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 234; Brad Hooker and Margaret Olivia Little, *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 276-304; Little, Margaret Olivia, "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory," *The Hastings Center Report* 31.4 (2001): 32-40.

Thus, Little claims that, rather than just existing as a collection of a cacophony of stories with shifting valences, moral particularism admits of what Aristotle called "for the most part generalizations" about moral judgments. Such a claim is neither a statistical one about the rate of occurrence of certain events, for then it would not be "robustly explanatory,"[329] for "[e]xcept in areas like quantum mechanics, which are ruled by genuinely statistical laws, statistical generalizations are contingent ones," nor is it an "'enthymeme'–a claim containing suppressed premises we could fill in if we just had the time," where "'for the most part' generalizations are indeed explanatory, but they are thought capable of serving that function only because the exceptions are in principle eliminable."[330]

Instead, "for the most part" generalizations, such as "lying is mostly wrong," or "it is usually right to have respect for persons" are both "porous and genuinely explanatory" in that when we say that a generalization has a certain feature

> what we really want to say is not that such a connection always, or even usually, holds, but that the conditions in which it does hold are particularly revealing of that item's nature. We might put it by saying that we're asserting what happens in "normal" conditions, except that the notion of `normalcy' is so freighted with misleading connotations. Better put, then, we are taking as privileged, in one way or another, cases in which the item has the feature specified. There are various ways in which that privileging move can take place....[331]

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[329] Margaret Olivia Little, "On Knowing the 'Why': Particularism and Moral Theory," *The Hastings Center Report* 31.4 (2001): 32.

[330] Little 32.

[331] Little 32.

Specifically, "for the most part" generalizations work something like this:

> Suppose....somebody wishes to send a message to your neighbor, Joe. You come back from work every day on the subway and walk home from the station, and each day when you walk past, Joe is sitting on his front porch reading his newspaper. It seems to be Joe's nearly infallible daily ritual. Are you *justified* in saying that you can take the message to Joe, having confidence that you will see him on his front porch today, also, and be able to give him the message?[332]

The answer is most likely "yes." And our answer might become even more certain if we know several more facts about Joe: "Joe was not on the porch; he was mowing his back lawn. But you also know that those were days when it had rained incessantly for a week previously and those were the fist available times that Joe could get out the lawn mower – you know that Joe prizes a neatly mowed lawn as much as he prizes his daily newspaper ritual."[333] Even if we take into account the possibility of exceptions – say, that Joe is ill and has to stay indoors, or on vacation, or whatever else might make us stop and wonder whether we can take the message to Joe – unless the exception is truly unexpected, we, through observation of Joe over time, can assure ourselves with *some (not absolute)* certainty that he will reliably be where we expect him to be. Whether our decision is right, therefore, is

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[332] Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 214.

[333] Brody 214.

not decided in an epistemic vacuum, but depends on a number of other facts about the situation.

The point is this: while we cannot make an absolute, universal rule about Joe's porch-sitting behavior as would be necessitated by the theoretical-juridical model, we can still make a "for the most part" judgment that would apply to cases similar to the ones we have observed over time. That is, two epistemic shifts take place. First, as a result of observation over time, we become better at discerning, observing, and interpreting particular kinds of cases because we are interested in making informed decisions based on reasonable likelihood of patterns. Second, we begin to better see the weight of conceptual priority of a given situation. Through repeated practice, we become more precise discerners of what counts as the more fundamental features in like cases – features that are much more reliable in guiding our judgment than the exceptions and changes that can take place at the periphery.

Even though thus far I have been discussing the process of coming to reasonable empirical judgments, I take this "for the most part" approach to be a philosophically robust way to begin considering moral judgment in general and the process of constraining illness narratives in particular.

First, generally, defeasible, or "for the most part" generalizations will not grant us a fixed view of what the moral nature of actions or dispositions. Just as we could not discern with absolute certainty if Joe would be sitting on the porch on particular day so we cannot give a final and fixed answer to the question of, say, when lying is justified or unjustified. As I noted above, what matters is the practice and skill with which we approach and navigate moral decisions.

"For the most part" generalizations, however, do "preserve a distinction between actions or dispositions that can, and those that cannot, properly be said to have a moral nature."[334] Just as certain behaviors that we have observed in the case of Joe have led us to make certain defeasible judgments that reasonably predicted his actions, so, through moral discernment, we can begin to pick out which sorts of considerations tend to hold, what sorts of considerations are *moral* concepts, and thus tend to justify our judgments, all things considered. And this discernment helps us, as Little notes, in "knowing what Aristotle called the `why' rather than the `that.' For mastery of moral concepts is mastery of defeasible generalizations."[335] The practice of moral work, therefore, will lead us to appreciate the porous stability of certain concepts so that we can, in the end, say that certain kinds of stories are morally troubling, and thus might be candidates for rejection. Such a conclusion will not be grounded in a codifiable principle, but neither will it be a whim of the observer – it will be grounded in a defeasible reason which fairly reliably tells us which states of affairs are morally suspect. Thus, as witnesses, we might not merely sense *that* a particular story ought not be identity-constituting – we might have a well-grounded judgment as to *why*.

Second, specifically, there are (at least) two perspectives to consider in the case of constraining illness narratives that rely on "for the most part" generalizations, although I think that they are very much related. First, *the patient-specific perspective*: I have noted above that by watching Joe and his habits, we can develop a reliably well-grounded judgment about his whereabouts, and thus act on them with some expectation of (imperfect) reliability. Illness narratives, I suggest, might work in very similar ways: in trying to determine how to

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[334] Margaret Olivia Little, "On Knowing the `Why': Particularism and Moral Theory," *The Hastings Center Report* 31.4 (2001): 32.

[335] Little 32.

discard one narrative as non-identity-constituting in favor of another that is, we might take into account *a substantive pattern* of narratives in which someone has engaged over time. Thus, for example, Mrs. P.'s illness narrative about "never having cared" for the sorts of things that mattered to her over her lifetime might, "for the most part," be taken to be less identity-constituting (or perhaps even non-identity-constituting). On the other hand, her careful attention to her doctor's orders, including her insistence that she be on time to see him, might be viewed as quite consistent with her pattern of paying attention to details and concerning herself with, among other things, her own well-being.

Such observations, however, do not rely on a mere mathematical analysis of the likelihood or frequency of one pattern of narratives versus another. While a historical pattern is of course an important part of the witness's judgment-making process, what is at issue is the priority of certain concepts, values, or beliefs of the narrator, and how they intersect with the role of the listener. What this might mean is that while a family member with a longer, deeper relationship with the patient (but no medical experience) has a different understanding than a physician of how to interpret a given narrative, they both share the *fundamental* goal of helping the patient find her voice and re-create her identity. It is from this basic concept of the patient re-engaging with herself that the individual conversations about variations of how to go about it can take place. This analysis by no means suggests *absolutely* that Mrs. P's more "negative" narratives are always to be constrained in favor of her more "positive" ones – a deeply ill person might very well not wish to attend parties or even entertain guests in her home, even if doing so has previously given her much joy. The point is that this context-dependence does not preclude the existence of some genuine practices, beliefs, and values on the part of the narrator that are in fact more fundamentally

identity-constituting than others, and that can be judged by those external to the narrator to be worthy of serious uptake, and thus of moral justification.

There are, of course a number of objections – most of which I take to require much more space and time than I have here. I will briefly note only a few.

To begin, it is of course a presupposition of my view that in order to be able to make decisions about illness narratives, those engaged in the decision-making are able and willing to take the time to know the patient. Given the structure of the medical establishment (not to mention the alienation that can be found even within the closest of personal relationships), this is not always possible. What is possible, I suggest, is at the very least an awareness on the part of medical staff and others who care for the patient that listening to patients' stories, judging what one hears, and acting on that judgment, is a moral act. The physician especially is in a position to make well-informed judgments from the number of cases – and thus the number of stories – that her she hears thought his or her career. To learn to *actively and critically* hear what the patient is saying, and when puzzled, to inquire into how a current narrative compares with the rest of the patient's pre-illness life story, is itself a normative act that may go quite far in helping a wounded narrator reconstruct a damaged identity.

Moreover, the "for the most part" judgment about which narratives ought to be constrained and which ought to be given uptake seems to be, on the one hand, too *relativistic* in regard to context, and on the other, too quickly claiming a certain level of *unearned* normative competence in cases where such judgment have an enormous impact on an already-vulnerable population of seriously ill individuals. To this, I respond by first acknowledging the very legitimate concerns about the lack of moral rigor and unjustified confidence. However, I believe that we might begin to address both worries by adopting a

more humble stance toward both our ability as narrators and as listeners. What I mean is that, given that we necessarily inhabit both roles continuously, we should, to the extent possible, try to remain open to our weaknesses as storytellers – and thus avoid the indulgence of the relativistic any-story-is-a-good-story position– as well as to our tendency to become rigid in our judgments as listeners about which stories matter, and why. Attending to our experience with stories might teach us what tends to matter most across cases and individuals, while the specific contexts of individual narratives might move us to see a particular narrative, as told by a particular storyteller, as identity-constituting for reasons that we might not have yet imagined.

Second, *the deeply ill patients-in-general perspective*. The question, although very similar to the patient-specific one, becomes a larger, theoretical one of how to understand and thus normatively constrain an almost limitless number of narratives, such as one encounters in medical practice. I conclude this chapter, and this dissertation, by suggesting several organizing ideas that those who are confronted by a cacophony of stories, as well as those of us addressing individual ones – might consider, and the reasons for considering them.

First, we ought to keep in mind that in a clinical setting – or in any setting where one is made vulnerable by serious illness – serious, identity-threatening power differentials exist. As the healthy listeners and caretakers of the narrator, we must therefore be careful not to grant identity-constituting status to narratives that directly or indirectly support, enforce, or create an oppressive power structure. This means, as listeners, we have to do the moral work of challenging narratives that, like Ms. B's and S's, diminish and disempower the patient – and we must do so even if allowing such narratives might help the medical staff by depicting the patient as compliant, passive, and "easy to handle." Moreover, as a matter of a general (yet defeasible) consideration, we might tentatively support the *narratives of*

possibility that emphasize the patient's "I" which "does" rather than the "I" which is "done to." This requires some clarification. What I mean is not that independence and activity ought to be taken as necessarily identity-constituting when neither of them remains available to the patient. But what might be maintained – or re-created – is a kind of "staying in one's life", where one is still a moral agent who is capable of a number of actions, even if they no longer include physical activity or independent living. And "staying in one's life" seems to suggest that there is someone to "keep" the patient there.

What this means is that, importantly, deciding which narratives ought to be identity-constituting is only the beginning – it is only a part of our roles as listeners and as caretakers to help guide the ill individual through the identity-annihilating experience of serious illness. The other part of our moral work involves redefining, through our words and our actions, what it means "to do," to be a moral agent, to be a part of the moral community. Specifically, this means helping the deeply ill patient understand that even if staying in his or her life might no longer include doing so with one's pre-illness capacities, such as independence, active participation in work, family life, or even wardrobe decisions, it still very well includes *other ways of being*, other kinds of moral agency, that are valuable and important in themselves: thinking; loving; expressing anger, fear, happiness, frustration, hope, and so on; when possible, sharing decision-making responsibilities – and being acknowledged, being *held,* as a member of the moral community in the process. And perhaps, through the epistemic, moral, and metaphysical darkness that too often descends with a terminal or serious chronic diagnosis on us as patients and as those who care for the patient, we can, through storytelling and story-witnessing, come to know each other again, where

.... the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.[336]

[336] T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets,* ed. Tristan Fecit, June 2000, 3 July 2007 <http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/>.

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