

Narrative Identity and Narrative Understanding
Workshop, Eötvös University, Institute of Philosophy

Date: 3 May 2019

Venue: Eötvös University, Faculty of Arts (Trefort-Courtyard, Budapest, VIII, Múzeum krt.
4.) Building I, 2nd floor, György Bence Room

Programme

9:00 – 9:15 OPENING REMARKS

9:15 – 10:00 Tim Thornton (University of Central Lancashire)

NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING, NORMATIVITY AND THE LIMITS OF UNDERSTANDABILITY

10:00 – 10:45 Zsuzsanna Balogh (ELTE)

NARRATIVITY AND OUR SENSE OF SELF

10:45 – 11:30 Zsófia Zvolenszky (ELTE)

LIMITS ON AUTHORS' AUTHORITY OVER FICTIONAL WORLDS

11:30 – 12:00 Coffee break

12:00 – 12:45 Judit Szalai (ELTE)

SELF-NARRATIVES IN BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

12:45 – 13:30 Gergely Ambrus (ELTE)

SELF, NARRATIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Lunch Break

14:30 – 15:15 Inga Römer (Université Grenoble Alpes)

PERSON, NARRATIVITY AND MORAL OBLIGATION

15:15 – 16:00 David Weberman (CEU)

ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF COMPETING NARRATIVES

16:00 – 16:45 Csaba Olay (ELTE)

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF EXPLICIT NATIONAL IDENTITY

Coffee break

17:15 – 18:00 Gábor Boros (ELTE-KRE)

FIRST PHASE OF THE NARRATIVE THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY: DILTHEY, MISCH AND VOL. V
OF *POETIK UND HERMENEUTIK (GESCHICHTE – EREIGNIS UND ERZÄHLUNG)*

18:00 – 18:45 Csaba Pléh (CEU)

NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN ITS CRISES IN MODERN LITERATURE

Dinner/Reception

ABSTRACTS

Tim Thornton (University of Central Lancashire)

NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING, NORMATIVITY AND THE LIMITS OF UNDERSTANDABILITY

Narrative understanding has been proposed as a significant complement to criteriological diagnosis in psychiatry. Giving an account of what this means, however, faces a dilemma. Understanding ‘narrative’ in literary terms yields a substantial but too narrow application for psychiatry. Understood without reference to any specific form, however, grants greater application but at the cost of vacuity. I suggest a broad construal but one which takes normativity – in the sense of aiming at correctness via having good reasons – as an essential prerequisite. This normative dimension suggests a therapeutic role for first person narratives in articulating conceptions of recovery to address the opposed risks of subjectivism and paternalism. It also suggests that the limits of narrative understandability might act as a sign of psychopathology. But if so, it implies that at the limit, strictly, there isn’t anything to be so understood.

Zsuzsanna Balogh (Eötvös Loránd University)

NARRATIVITY AND OUR SENSE OF SELF

Classic philosophical discussions of personal identity are mostly metaphysical in nature, i.e. they aim at defining what it is (e.g. a mental connection or a human animal) that persists through time and creates our sense of continuous existence. However, if we take a more subject-centered approach to personal identity, narrativity comes into the picture independently of our metaphysical commitment. In my talk I will focus on the role narrativity may play as a phenomenological element that constitutes our sense of (individual) self and try to reconcile this with metaphysical approaches by employing Richard Wollheim’s (1984) relevant conceptual clarification.

Zsófia Zvolenszky (Eötvös Loránd University)

LIMITS ON AUTHORS' AUTHORITY OVER FICTIONAL WORLDS

In previous work I made a case for one way in which authors of narrative fiction have limited authority over the fictional worlds they create. I argued that occasionally, the inhabitants of those worlds are inadvertently created by authors. The reason: if authors erroneously believe that there is, in reality, a person/city they intend to feature in their work, then they inadvertently create a fictional object as an inhabitant of the world they are describing. In my presentation, I will explore how those arguments having to do with authors’ error relate to limitations from another source on authors’ authority over the fictional objects they create: limitations that emerge in the context of various intentionalist views about the interpretation of works of narrative fiction.

Judit Szalai (Eötvös Loránd University)

SELF-NARRATIVES IN BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Persons with personality disorders often have a tendency to therapy-resistance. This can be partly attributed to patients' self-defeating coping styles and interpersonal difficulties. I claim that there is a further, epistemic factor to therapeutic failure as well: those suffering from certain personality disorders are uniquely ill-positioned to recognize their gaps in self-understanding and revise their self-related narratives. I illustrate the problem with the most poignant case, that of borderline personality disorder.

Gergely Ambrus (Eötvös Loránd University)

SELF, NARRATIVITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The lecture addresses Marya Schechtman's Narrative-Self-Constitution View about the nature and identity of persons, concentrating on three issues. (1) I will briefly present and evaluate Schechtman's criticism of reductionist theories of persons and the psychological continuity theory of personal identity through time, focusing on her criticism of Parfit's notion of q-memory (*quasi-memory*) and other q-states. (2) I will discuss the role identification may play in grounding personal identity, contrasting Schechtman's and Parfit's views on this matter. (3) I will shortly comment on the plausibility of the idea that moral responsibility should be tied to narrativity.

Inga Römer (Université Grenoble Alpes)

PERSON, NARRATIVITY AND MORAL OBLIGATION

What is the relation between the person, its possible narrative constitution and moral obligation? What is the philosophical link between the problem of the person, the problem of narrativity and the problem of justifying moral obligation? In order to discuss these questions, I will proceed in four parts.

The first part is an overview of the history of the notion of the person in analytic philosophy and in phenomenology. It shows a shift of the question within analytic philosophy, which leads to a convergence of the two traditions in the theory of narrative identity. In spite of this proximity, a certain opposition remains between an analytic constructivism and a phenomenological theory of lived narrativity. A second part is dedicated to the theory of narrative identity itself, insofar as it has traditionally been connected to Aristotelian ethics of a good life. I will discuss that this approach encounters certain limits, when faced with the problem of moral obligation. In order to face those limits, a third part will turn to the Kantian approach developed by Christine Korsgaard. She grounds moral obligation in the notion of the practical and moral identity of a person. The fourth and final part contains a constructive critique of Korsgaard's approach. I argue that Korsgaard's constructivist notion of a practical identity and her connected theory of moral obligation has to be modified by insights gained within the theory of narrative identity and within the phenomenology of alterity and responsibility.

Moral obligation can neither be grounded in classic narrative identity nor can it be grounded in a purely voluntaristic, practical identity, but it has to be understood on the basis of a processual narrative identity of the responding person.

David Weberman (Central European University)

ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF COMPETING NARRATIVES

We reconstruct past events, whether in history or in everyday life, in the form of narratives. Yet narratives of one and the same set of events can and do differ. What is the relation between such different narratives? Must they necessarily conflict? When are they and when are they not compatible? If we can tell stories in many different ways without getting the facts wrong, what constraints can there be for judging the adequacy of competing narratives?

Csaba Olay (Eötvös Loránd University)

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF EXPLICIT NATIONAL IDENTITY

In an earlier paper I proposed a distinction between implicit regional identity and explicit national identity which is able to give an account of difficult cases of national identity. I argued that on the implicit level that includes the vernacular, customs, habits, and mentality we have a basic orientation, articulation and frame of reference of the world around us and of ourselves. It is something given, something we grow up and are socialised into. On the explicit level of national identity – including the members of the nation as community, belonging to the national community, more or less shared accounts of common history, nation as a common enterprise, and political institutions of the nation – however, we have an identification offer, towards which we have a much freer relationship: we may make use of it, refuse it, or even be neutral with regard to it. In this talk I try to elaborate the narrative structure of explicit national identity. I show that the explicit level of national identity has a narrative structure, and for this purpose the narrative theory of personal identity can be taken as a model. The basic claim of the narrative theory of personal identity is that the identity of human persons should be grasped through a life narrative. Versions of the theory differ in specifying nature, scope, and author of the story (MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Taylor). Major motivation for a narrative theory of national identity is the attempt to avoid both horns of the following false dilemma: either to comprehend national identity as a given object that we can describe from an external point of view, or to regard it as an arbitrary fiction in favour of special desires or interests. In opposition to these conceptions, I propose to consider national identity as the result of an interpretation discourse on significant common experiences and shared history where the plurality of interpretations inevitably affects the process of interpretation. While highlighting common aspects, the argumentation also considers differences between the narrative conception of collective and personal identity.

Gábor Boros (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary and Eötvös Loránd University)

FIRST PHASE OF THE NARRATIVE THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY: DILTHEY, MISCH AND VOL. V OF *POETIK UND HERMENEUTIK (GESCHICHTE – EREIGNIS UND ERZÄHLUNG)*

„First phase” means chronological and logical priority at the same time. Among the fragments of Dilthey’s *Aufbau*-project there is an exciting description of what one can interpret both as the systematically first moment of the awakening of consciousness and as the elevation of an individual person and an individual object at once from the unstoppable flow of life. On the object-side this is passivity, *being elevated*. On the person-side the same event is a hardly separable mixture of activity and passivity, elevating and being elevated in one.

At the same time, this elevation does not remain a solitary *one*. The person perceives itself as the identical subject of elevations as opposed to the plurality of the objects on the other side.

It experiences itself as containing the connection of the plurality, the active pole that generates connection. At the same time, it attempts to grasp itself by connecting the moments of elevation as coherent parts of a whole. This connection provides it with a relatable coherence – a narrabile – that when related constitutes the narrative of identity of the person.

Dilthey's pupil, Georg Misch explicated this basic philosophical idea as an archetype in the context of historical reality, when conceiving and realising his monumental series of the history of autobiography: how did the autobiography – life as describing itself, as it were – appear and develop from ancient antiquity until the 18th century. Misch only refers to it but one can complete the history unfolding in this way by the various evidences of the disappearance, the becoming socialised of *personal* identity taken in its classical sense. Misch believes the history of *sui generis* autobiographies came to an end with Goethe. From this moment on, the multiplied production of autobiographies can only be studied as a sociologically based side-shoot of a discipline. In literary criticism we can see the closed, rounded-up works of art as the products of classical *personal* individuals gives way to variously opened structures. A similar methodological problem appeared analogously in the historical sciences as well: what kind of roles can the classical (world-)historical individual play in the process of constructing history – *res enarratae* – as history of *salient events*, where “event” means something particular elevated from the flow of life and made almost a closed whole by a *personal* actor. Or how – if at all – the “diachronic structures” developed from the socialising-socialised individuals or the global structures far below the scale of *personal* human lives – how they can/must be regarded as the main objects of a historical representation. Some historians see the former as connected to the genre of *narration* whereas the latter as attached to that of *description*. Koselleck himself considers them – structure and event, description and narration – conditioning each other, in a way that can easily be transformed into a hermeneutic circle.

In my talk, after presenting the “first phase” in a detailed manner I'll show the analogy between the hermeneutic circle of the historian and that of both the philosophers of life and the cultivator of fundamental ontology.

Csaba Pléh (Central European University)

NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN ITS CRISES IN MODERN LITERATURE

The talk starts from the idea that along with several modern decompositional self theories, the human self and identity have a twofold anchoring: one in the body image (from Maine de Biran through Mach to Damasio), the other one in narrative constructions, where the stories to others and to ourselves are supposing or creating an author like self (Ricoeur, Dennett).

This issue has been raised in contemporary literary theory as well. Are sciences of man and novel writing really targeting the same thing? David Lodge in his books on literary theory argues in detail that the formation of modern novel writing was a crucial contributor in the birth of the modern Ego, a more and more refined self not only exposed to the environment but interpreting it and actively engaging in this social world. The concept of an omniscient author and the corresponding idea of a novel having three layers took some time to be formed. These three layers are the layer of OUTER ACTIONS, that of INNER PLANS, and the layer of FEELINGS. The peculiar unity of classical novelistic literature is provided by the constant reflections of these layers to each other. The novel has played a crucial role in the formation of the modern self because it forced the reader as well to try to relate these three layers. The self consciousness characterizing European cultures has its sources in this self cultivation in the traditional bourgeois novel.

The talk shall argue that the modern, 20th century crises of identity in a way were sensed, sometimes first sensed in the crises of this traditional novelistic narration. As Milan Kundera noted: writers were experimenting with knowledge structures, and prefigured a narrative concept of identity (including with its crises), well before it was formulated as a theory of mind by philosophers. Virginia Woolf summarized these crises early on, in 1925. If the “writer were not a slave but free, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall.”

With the advent of the ‘no story stories’ the different versions arrived as variations to the traditional unity:

- we are engaged in self monologues (Joyce)
- we do not know who we are (Musil)
- we do not go anywhere (Camus)
- heroes are not lords of their fate (Kafka)

The talk shall speculate how these new writing styles and experimenting with the self have influenced our stability and flexibility, both in tragic, and in liberating ways.