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A CRITICISM OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY A NEURO-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The notion of narrative identity began to appear in philosophical and psychological jargon in the 1980s. McAdams (2011, 99) claims to have provided the first full theoretical model of narrative identity in his 1985 monograph.¹ According to this renowned narrative psychologist, “Narrative identity is an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person’s life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning” (MCADAMS 2011, 100). Narrative identity consists of a person’s reconstructed personal past

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¹ His model consists of three levels: (1) dispositional traits, (2) personal concerns, and (3) identity characterized with unity and purpose (which applies only to adults and perhaps modern societies that emphasize the individuation of the self) (see MCADAMS 1995). This does not deny the antecedent philosophical elaborations of this notion, for instance, by MacIntyre (1981). However, McAdams has been a pioneer in providing a model and detailed discussion in the field of psychology.

combined with an imagined future in order to have a historical account of her own development. From this psychological perspective, people in the late adolescent years begin to understand their lives in narrative order and continue to make sense of their own and others' lives through narratives (MCADAMS 2011, 100). According to Erikson (1958), identity looks like a story that puts life together in time and culture: "to be adult means among other things to see one's own life in continuous perspective, in both retrospect and prospect" (MCADAMS 2011, 101). However, psychologists are aware that full integration and unity in life is quite rare and an idealization. Raggatt (2006), for instance, argues that it is not possible to gain an integrated and unified identity; people, rather, have multiple identities, which produce opposing images of the self. Nevertheless, individuals need a modicum of unity, purpose, and integration amidst the confusions and distractions of life (MCADAMS 2011, 102).

From the philosophical perspective, Paul Ricoeur is one of the most influential advocates of narrative identity. In his view, the self comes into being only in the process of telling a life story. The self in this story interprets her past, present, and future. According to Ricoeur, the person becomes a responsible and ethical agent only by telling a meaningful and coherent life story (RICOEUR 1986; as cited in CHO 2018). For Ricoeur (1986, 129), every human experience is already mediated by all sorts of symbolic systems mediated by all kinds of stories we have heard. The stories that we receive from our culture constitute our narrative identity, which we can unceasingly reinterpret (RICOEUR 1986, 131).

Charles Taylor also holds that we make sense of ourselves through narratives. According to him, a basic condition of making sense of ourselves is that we grasp our lives in a narrative. For Taylor, the minimal sense of life requires two elements. The first is to have an orientation towards the good, which makes it possible to have strong and qualitative evaluations. The second is to grasp our lives in a narrative. We need a coherent narrative to make sense of our lives: "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going". Life is an unfolding story into which a sense of the good has to be woven (TAYLOR 1992, 47).

Schechtman (1996, 10) also holds that we need an account of identity over the course of persons' extended temporal segments as well as their entire lives. Her focus is on lived history and constructing coherent autobiographies. According to her theory named as narrative self-constitution view, "individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of

themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to have experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs. Some, but not all, individuals weave stories of their lives, and it is their doing so which makes them persons" (SCHECHTMAN 1996, 94).

MacIntyre's notion of narrative identity is very much like that of Ricoeur, Taylor, and Schechtman. MacIntyre's account, like Ricoeur's and Taylor's, has ethical content. As will be shown in the current paper, his account of narrative identity is related to his Aristotelian ethics, according to which moral evaluation needs an account of the good life and the human final *telos*, which give unity and purpose to our life as characteristics of a narrative.

We will argue in this paper that though identity is formed in the eye of others, it does not need to be constituted in a unified narrative form, i.e., the agent does not need to place all episodes of her life in narrative order, and have a consistent and unified account of her life, which includes her life from birth to death (MACINTYRE 1981, 217). Rather, shorter-term episodes of time suffice for identity formation. We often bracket out some episodes of our lives and do not undertake to narrate stories about them; and this does not damage our sense of personhood (see LANE 2011). In what follows, we will first explain MacIntyre's account of identity through his works, and then present some of the criticisms of his view.

MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY

The notion of narrative has received much attention in MacIntyre's work. This notion is tantamount to his notion of tradition-constituted rationality as both emphasize a kind of continuity that is found in traditions. According to MacIntyre (1981, 217), a narrative is a story that merges an agent's different practices and episodes into each other to form a unified life, which runs from her birth to her death. In other words, the agent to have a consistent identity should be able to narrate a story about her life, which relates the different episodes of her life to each other. This story should explain the transition between these episodes. As will be explained below, this story is based on the notion of the good. A notion of the good should be present in the agent's life to give a direction to her life. This integrity forms an identity for the agent. We intend to challenge this narrative view of identity in this paper.

MacIntyre's account of identity is related to his account of the intelligibility of actions. The intelligibility of actions is in the eye of others, and our

repeated actions, behaviors, revealed feelings and emotions across time will lead to the formation of an identity for us by others as well as by ourselves. Thus, identity formation and development in the eyes of others depend on how they conceive of our actions, and whether they consider our actions as intelligible or not.

For MacIntyre, identity is constituted by meanings given to our actions and life by others. Thus, the discussion of identity leads to the discussion of actions and their intelligibility: “we become what others already took us to be” (MACINTYRE 1986, 64). Identity for MacIntyre is formed in the eyes of others and in the context of narratives and traditions.

Intelligibility is related to what counts as a good reason in a specific context. An intelligible act is an act that can be socially recognized as based on good reasons (*ibid.*, 67–68). Fear of a snake and escaping from it, for example, is intelligible, as it is based on good reasons taking into account human physical capacity.

Intelligibility is related to moral virtues and vices. Moral virtues are intelligible states or causes of actions. For instance, whether we identify an agent as courageous or cowardly depends on how we understand her actions, in the general sense, in particular contexts, and whether we consider her actions intelligible, *i.e.*, based on good reasons or not. For example, we do not identify a person who is afraid of snakes as cowardly; and neither do we identify a person who does not keep her distance from snakes as brave. She is rather a reckless person. Thus, our intelligible and unintelligible actions in the long term conduce to the formation of our sense of identity.

To explain MacIntyre’s account of intelligibility, we need to discuss further MacIntyre’s account of action. Action in “any full-blooded sense” cannot be unintelligent. An unintelligent action is not an action; and an action cannot be an isolated individual piece of behavior. An action is an action only in light of its relation to the agent’s “antecedent states, relationships and transactions”. The idea of an action without relation to a context is a myth (MACINTYRE 1987, 24–25). MacIntyre (1959, 89) distinguishes an action from a body movement in that the former is purposeful and intentional.

Intelligibility is an objective feature of actions, in the sense that others should acknowledge the intelligibility of actions, and “it is not in the eye of the beholder” (MACINTYRE 1986, 64): “we become what others already took us to be” (*ibid.*).

In MacIntyre’s view, the relation of actions to the agent’s antecedent states and transactions is not sufficient for making all actions intelligible,

particularly those actions that happen in practices and contexts different from ordinary and routine life. His example for this is a person eating out of hunger the last member of a fruit species in a research practice (MACINTYRE 1986, 73). This action is intelligible in the context of normal life, unlike in this research practice, because the action can be accounted for with good reasons in the former, but not in the latter case.

Besides practices and contexts at the level of practice, there is a larger framework that is, in MacIntyre's view, essential for the intelligibility of some actions. This framework is a narrative that integrates an agent's different practices, his past events and memories into a single life.

MacIntyre (1981, 216) holds that the human being is essentially a story-telling animal. She enters into human society with one or more "imputed characters", which should be understood as a condition for maintaining interactions with others. She only knows what she is to do if she already knows what stories she is a part of. The empiricists such as Locke and Hume and contemporary analytical philosophers, MacIntyre states, have failed to notice this background of personal identity (217). The person is what is taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from his birth to his death. Without this unity, and if a person's narrative does not belong to larger narratives, his life becomes meaningless (*ibid.*). In the next section, we will explain further MacIntyre's triple notions of practice, narrative, and tradition, which are necessary for the intelligibility of actions.

THE PROCESS OF PRACTICE-NARRATIVE-TRADITION

By practice MacIntyre (1981, 187) means "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized."

According to this definition, we can identify two related concepts: 1) standards of excellence and rules, and 2) achievement of internal goods. Practice for MacIntyre is constituted by internal good(s) that in turn will determine some standards as standards of excellence. These standards precede the individual, like the rules of chess, and their authority should be acknowledged to make the actions intelligible.

MacIntyre defines a virtue on this basis as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (191). The widespread acceptance of the

goods, and thus, the rules of practices assign them authority over their participants.

There might be some external and or peripheral goods in practices, such as wealth, fame, pride, entertainment. If these external goods replace the internal good or supersede it, the character of the practice and the kind of relationship between the participants would change fundamentally. Practices need some traits and characteristics, i.e., virtues, to keep themselves intact from distractions and from being considered as mere devices to achieve external goods.

MacIntyre at this stage introduces some traits—the virtues of justice, courage, and honesty—as the necessary components of every practice (191–92). The common aspect of these “genuine virtues” is that all subordinate the participants within the borders of the practice; all require the people to appeal to some impersonal criteria in their relationships and judgments.

MacIntyre holds that his account of the virtues in terms of practices is partial and needs to be completed (201). In his view, if the different and incompatible practices are not placed in a broader context, i.e., a unified human life, the individual will find himself oscillating in an arbitrary way between them; consequently, it may seem that practices finally derive their authority from arbitrary individual decisions.

He defines some virtues such as justice, patience, and integrity or constancy in such a way that they presuppose a hierarchical order of goods (202). Justice in the Aristotelian scheme is defined as giving each person her due or desert; so MacIntyre holds that “goods internal to practices need to be ordered and evaluated in some way if we are to assess relative deserts.” The content of the virtue of patience, MacIntyre maintains, depends on how we order various goods in a hierarchy (202).

Finally, the virtue of integrity or constancy requires the singleness of purpose, which only applies in the context of a unified human life. Accordingly, MacIntyre concludes that unless there is a concept of a final *telos* that transcends the limited goods of practices it will be both the case that 1) a certain subversive arbitrariness will invade a person’s moral life and 2) we shall be unable to specify the context of certain virtues adequately (203).

He uses the term narrative to describe the unity of human life. A narration or story enjoys a unity of subject so different patterns are connected to convey a unified picture of the subject; the same is true for human life. In other words, human life to be intelligible and meaningful should enjoy a unity like that of a narration (218–19).

MacIntyre so far has finished the second stage of the process of defining the virtues. So far, he has located the virtues in the context of a good life for human beings, elevating them from the context of practices. He defines the virtues as

those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptation and distractions which we encounter and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. (1981, 219).

To enter into a practice, MacIntyre maintains, is “to enter into a relationship with others not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point” (194).

In fact, practices provide some norms and objective criteria to communicate with others; and since every practice has a history, the participants in practices realize that the norms and criteria available to them are constructed through a history.

A narrative in a broader landscape is directed to tradition. Given the social and historical identity of individuals, “the narrative of anyone life is part of an interlocking set of narratives” (218). These interlocked narratives make a tradition—a tradition that MacIntyre defines as follows: “A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” (222).

To be a subject of a narrative that runs from one’s birth to one’s death is to be accountable for one’s actions, which makes the actions intelligible. In MacIntyre’s terms, a narrative concept of selfhood requires two things:

1) I am what I am taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death. I am the subject of a history that is my own and no one else’s, which has its particular meaning.

2) We are accountable to other people who are present in our story (217–18).

Thus, personal identity is constituted in its relation to the concepts of narrative, intelligibility, and accountability. Tradition and narrative provide the necessary sources to render our behavior meaningful. In other words, our intentions, aims, and purposes are only intelligible given their relation to traditions and social settings. As MacIntyre maintains “there is no such thing as behavior to be identified prior to and independently of intentions, beliefs, and settings” (208).

In sum, for MacIntyre, both the intelligibility of our actions and the notion of the virtues are based on a unified narrative of life. Without this background, we cannot define the virtues, at least some of them like patience and constancy, adequately.

In the next section, we will refer to some criticisms of MacIntyre's account of narrative identity and intelligibility.

STRAWSON'S CRITICISM OF MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY

Strawson (2004) has offered a criticism of MacIntyre's account of narrative identity. In his view, there are two interpretations of narrative identity; the first is a psychological narrativity thesis, according to which ordinary people experience their lives as a narrative; that is, a unified picture of life as a whole. This is a descriptive thesis about the way people understand their lives. The second is a normative thesis, according to which, it is good that people experience their lives as a narrative (*ibid.*, 428). Strawson thinks both theses are false. In his view, some people experience their lives in a non-narrative way, and they are non-narrative good ways to live. He describes the narrative account of the self as a diachronic view, which sees the self as having long-term continuity from the further past to the further future.

The opposite view is the episodic self, which does not see such a continuity (430). Episodic people are more located in the present time about their self-experience, though they also relate to their past and future memories. In both styles of life, the present is informed and responsible by and to the past, albeit with different characteristics and experiential consequences (432).

For the episodic self, Strawson argues, the past can be present in the present without being regarded as the past, simply by shaping the present, in the same way as the past practices of musicians shape their present performance without being mediated by explicit memory of those practices. As I understand, Strawson is saying that our past experiences factually exert influence on us without us necessarily being aware of it. Our past, not our memory of the past, influences us.

Strawson argues that for him as a relatively episodic person, his life does not have a narrative form; he has no interest in his past nor any concern for his future. As he apprehends his self, his remote past and future are not his past and future, though they are the past and future of Strawson. In his view,

although he has autobiographical memories of the past, as he experiences the self, these facts have not occurred to him. He claims, without arguing, that these past facts certainly have happened to him as a human being but not to his self or to me*, in which the star concerns the way we experience our self (433). In Strawson's view, although the past has occurred to us as human beings, and particularly has relevance to our self, the self, or the I* as we experience it has not been metaphysically present in the past, and will not be in the future (434).

Strawson holds that "MacIntyre, Taylor and all other supporters of the ethical Narrativity thesis are just talking about themselves", and their view about the unity of life and its ethical necessity does not hold for the human being as such (437). In his view, there are other ways of ethical life, which do not require this narrative account. The ethical narrativity thesis, Strawson holds, is another "deep divider of the human race" (*ibid.*).

MACINTYRE'S RESPONSE TO STRAWSON

MacIntyre (2016, 241) responds to Strawson that he does not mean human beings most of the time experience their lives as narratives. They, rather, become aware of the narrative structure of their lives infrequently, when they want to make themselves intelligible to others by telling the relevant parts of their story, or when they have some reasons to ask how their life has gone so far and should go in the future, and what the good is for them. The question of the good has narrative presuppositions.

In MacIntyre's view (242), even a life lived episodically has a history and can be evaluated as a life. The happy-go-lucky life that Strawson praises is possible because others who do not lead such a life sustain relationships and institutions that make their lives possible: "Families, schools, workplaces, clinics, theatres, and sports teams only thrive if there are not too many happy-go-lucky lives."

MacIntyre (*ibid.*) maintains we understand both the vicissitudes of our desires and the course and outcomes of our practical reasoning in narrative terms, narratives that make the actions of particular agents intelligible and show them to be justified or unjustified. Besides, others' narratives play a role in our understanding of our own lives: "An immense number of Soviet citizens came to understand themselves and their everyday tasks, at least for the most part, just as Stalin intended them to understand them" (245).

NELSON'S CRITICISM OF MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT
OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY

Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2003) offers a criticism of MacIntyre's account of narrative identity from a feministic perspective. In her view, such an account of identity subordinates some individuals to others. Connecting personal life stories to the historical narratives of communities, this narrative account subordinates some people and excludes others (NELSON 2003, 57, as cited in RITIVOI 2011, 369).

In her view, MacIntyre's emphasis on tradition intensifies some individuals' marginalization; and the virtues which MacIntyre introduces in *After Virtue* do not allow us to address this problem (NELSON 2003, 59, as cited in RITIVOI 2011, 369). In her view, MacIntyre does not allow for the formation of counter-narratives, when it is necessary to rebel against some oppressive narratives, to assert new identities as opposed to the dominant storyline of a tradition. She, then, argues, like Strawson, that MacIntyre's and Taylor's narrative life is a moral construction for a very particular kind of life (NELSON 2003, 63, as cited in RITIVOI 2011, 370).

SCHNEEWIND'S CRITICISM OF MACINTYRE'S
ACCOUNT OF NARRATIVE INTELLIGIBILITY

J. B. Schneewind (1982, 656) criticizes MacIntyre's claim that narrative unity is fundamental for understanding human action. In MacIntyre's view, as explained earlier, understanding human reasons and long-term intentions is essential for understanding the meaning of the actions. For MacIntyre (1981, 208), short-term intentions are intelligible only in relation to long-term intentional frameworks from which they arise. As MacIntyre states, "behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and longest-term intentions invoked are and how the shorter-term intentions are related to the longer." Hence, to explain an act is to relate a narrative history, and only such a history makes an explanation possible (208).

According to Schneewind (1982, 658), MacIntyre's account of narrative explanation goes far too much, because all intelligible explanations of actions do not require referring to the longest-term intentions of the agent; for instance, we can explain some motions of an agent as dancing a jig, without narrating a story about her life or the tradition of dance.

MACINTYRE'S RESPONSE TO SCHNEEWIND

In response, MacIntyre (1982, 664) holds what makes a particular sequence of actions intelligible or unintelligible is both its relationship to antecedent episodes and its present character. MacIntyre holds that his concept of making intelligible is different from what Schneewind means by explaining, used in his example of dancing a jig. In MacIntyre's view (*ibid.*), making an act intelligible requires a narrative context. For instance, dancing a jig during a philosophical discussion is not *prima facie* intelligible, and requires a story to make it intelligible. The fact that an action falls under the description of a general type of act is not adequate to understand the action as an example of that act. Contexts give significance to agents' choices.

APPRAISAL OF THE DISCUSSION

Our position in this paper about narrative identity is close to Strawson's view explained above. However, we completely agree with MacIntyre's (2016, 241) claim in his recent book that we need a narrative account of our life to assess the progress of our life. Nevertheless, we cannot accept his earlier claim that identity formation requires a narrative account of life.

In our view, narrative identity is not necessary, neither psychologically nor ethically. Regarding the psychological aspect, we will later appeal to some empirical findings to support our view. Regarding the ethical aspect, we will criticize the underlying principle of MacIntyre's account of narrative identity; that is, good reasons for action and the intelligibility of actions derive ultimately from the good. This principle explains MacIntyre's support of a unified and narrative account of intelligibility and identity, because the good can be provided only in the context of a unified narrative of life.

We agree with MacIntyre (1986, 67–68) that intelligibility requires offering good reasons; however, our difference is that, in our view, good reasons do not derive their meaning and justification from the good. Eating an apple is *prima facie* intelligible, since it is based on apparent good reasons, unlike eating the last member of a species in a laboratory, which needs further explanation. We can guess that in normal conditions, the person is eating the apple because it is nutritious, or it relieves hunger and thirst, and these effects are publicly regarded as good reasons for action. The good of these effects does not derive from the human beings' ultimate good, a good that

unifies all episodes of life, or from her longest-term intentions, as claimed by MacIntyre (1981, 208). Whatever account of the good we have, and regardless of the overall shape of our lives, it is good to relieve hunger and thirst. Relieving hunger and thirst does not require further reasoning for being intelligible. In contrast, eating a piece of stone is *prima facie* unintelligible, as it is not based on good reasons, because we do not have a reason that this act conduces to the good of human beings. This act will be intelligible if it can be imagined to lead to a good; for instance, if the stone has therapeutic properties. In this case, this act will be intelligible in so far as and to the extent that this property is known by the agents. Indeed, eating the last member of a species in a lab can be intelligible in particular circumstances; for instance, when it is the only thing that can save the researcher prisoned in the lab. So is the case with dancing during a philosophical discussion, as in MacIntyre's example. We can imagine that this person is dancing due to her confusion in a discussion. If we ask her, she can certainly provide good reasons. These reasons might be narrative, but not in the wide sense employed by MacIntyre, and do not require a unified account of her life. This does not require, as MacIntyre (1982, 664) claims, a story to become intelligible, unless we have in mind a particular sense of story.

Although intelligibility is a social property, in the sense that it should be socially recognized, its grounds, i.e. good reasons, do not derive their meanings from a unified and narrative life. Furthermore, these grounds are context-relative and might not be known publicly in the beginning. In this case, it requires an explanation by the individual to the public about its grounds. In other words, the reasons the individual has for her actions might be, in principle, good reasons in the eyes of others, though they might not have access to these reasons. The agent can then reveal her intentions and reasons to others to win their recognition.

Therefore, the narrative account of intelligibility is neither necessary nor desirable for all actions. We do not need, and it is not always good, to place all our actions in the context of a narrative continuity to make them intelligible. We oppose MacIntyre's (1981, 208) claim that "behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and longest-term intentions are and how the shorter-term intentions are related to the longer." As Schneewind (1982, 653) put it, narrative continuity and story-telling are not necessary for intelligibility.

The intention to eat an apple is made intelligible by the part it plays in our health and satisfaction of our physical needs, as explained above. Eating

an apple is equally intelligible for an atheist or theist, as it addresses their common needs and goods. It would be redundant to relate it to the agent's longer and longest intentions. We should practice the principle of parsimony here; i.e., to request the least possible reasons of agents, including ourselves, for rendering their actions intelligible. Indeed, we most of the time do not know and are not aware of our own long-term intentions. Thus, it makes problems for the intelligibility of our actions if we relate it to these long-term intentions.

The locus of intelligibility and practical rationality lies in the interaction between the individual and the social. The individual can count what others think unintelligible as intelligible due to beliefs that are accessible only to her, and have the potential to be recognized as good reasons.

The chosen/given identity is a false dichotomy. We do not need to commit ourselves to the one side of it; rather, our identity is a mixture of given attributes confirmed, revised, or stripped away by the individual. The community gives the individual the capacity to think, among others, about herself, and not a fixed content of attributes about her identity. To use George Herbert Mead's terminology, "while the self as 'Me' is a product of society, the self as 'I' continuously reacts to the society that shapes it" (SERPE and STRYKER 2011, 228).

According to the traditional symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer, following Mead, "self emerges from society but becomes free of structural constraints over time, acting as an independent source of social behavior (MCCALL and SIMMONS 1978, as cited in SERPE and STRYKER 2011, 230). Novelty and creativity are highly probable in social life. Social life is continuously newly constructed.

However, we are not denying that our and others' narratives play a significant role in our understanding of ourselves, our actions and lives, and that we need a sense of continuity in our life. As Erikson (1968) explains, to be adaptive and functional, individuals need to perceive a sense of identity or continuity across the separate temporal episodes of their lives (BERZONSKY 2011, 55). However, the point is that these narratives need not be an explicit or implicit account of the good that encompasses all our life, and that not all our actions require this kind of intelligibility, a point that MacIntyre (2016) seems to acknowledge in his recent book.

We can witness that MacIntyre's view (2016, 241) has moved away from the notion of narrative unity and a unified account of life in *After Virtue* to the general importance of narratives in his recent book, where he admits that

our reference to the narrative of our life is infrequent and occurs when we intend to evaluate the general shape and progress of our lives. I do not deny the fact that human beings are storytellers, and appeal to some narratives to make their life intelligible. Nevertheless, the narrative does not need to be wide enough to cover the whole of life. For instance, eating an apple in normal conditions is an intelligible act, as it meets some of our needs. We do not need to recount a wide narrative about this act. Eating an apple is intelligible regardless of our life's general form, and our theory of the good. This is intelligible, because other human beings share with us the same need and understand how it meets their needs. Therefore, it does not require offering broader reasons.

Intelligibility is both an individualistic and a social issue. Its individualistic aspect is based on the beliefs that are only open to us but can be accepted as good reasons if offered to others. Its social aspect is based on shared understandings, which in turn are related to our shared needs, aims, and customs, some of which might be local and contextual. For instance, it is intelligible for men and women to shake hands in a western society, unlike in an Islamic or traditional one.

Therefore, the intelligibility of acts does not depend on the good. However, I admit that the intelligibility of life is different from the intelligibility of separate acts, which might seem to require a single unified narrative.

It might be objected that I only have discussed the intelligibility of single acts. However, single acts do not constitute our identity. Identity concerns the way we understand our entire life and ourselves. Single acts such as eating an apple do not constitute our identity; rather, our longer-term intentions, why we eat, and how we use the energy we get from eating are constitutive of our identity. This line of reasoning might support MacIntyre's account of narrative unity. In response to this possible objection, we offer the following responses.

1) Although a single act may not form human identity, the combination of single acts along with our intentions and feelings in different situations constitute it. Human identity is gradually formed as a result of her actions, motives, and feelings, and after its formation, it expresses itself in subsequent actions, intentions, and feelings. For instance, numerous cases of unjustifiable fear might produce an image of the individual as coward.

2) As we stated above, MacIntyre's account of identity is related to his philosophy of action. We explained the difference, in his view, between an action and a bodily movement. For MacIntyre, an action is constituted by its

relation to the agent's "antecedent states, relationships, and transactions". An action is purposeful and intentional (MACINTYRE 1959, 89), and has meaning only in a context (MACINTYRE 1987, 24–25). If an action is related to its antecedent states and transactions, and has meaning only in a context, then an apparently isolated and single act like eating an apple is not, in fact, a single act, and is a part of a sequence from where derives its meaning. The possibility of isolating acts is an assumption of analytical philosophy which MacIntyre (1981, 209) opposes. In contrast, in his view, the identification of an act requires understanding the agent's short and long-term intentions and the narrative history of the social setting: "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions" (208). In such a view, eating an apple, etc. is not a single act, as it is intertwined with the narrative and long-term intentions of the agent, and due to this connection, they are related to the agent's identity. In other words, acts are informed by the narratives that constitute our identity. By contrast, our view is that such a demanding narrative and historical identification of acts is not necessary. We can adequately explain acts by appeal to immediate or short-term intentions such as relieving hunger and thirst, etc.

Some findings of neuroscience also support our view that narrative memories of the past are not crucial for identity formation.² From a neuroscience perspective, the memory of personal experiences is crucial for identity development (FAUGHT 2016, 141). Allebone and colleagues (2015) have shown that some aspects of memory are necessary to our sense of who we are in the world (FAUGHT 2016, 142). Neural networks in the mesial temporal lobe that support autobiographical memory retrieval are fundamental to self-identity processes (ALLEBONE ET AL. 2015). These findings might seem to support MacIntyre's narrative account of identity, as they show that our memories are important for our sense of identity.³ Nevertheless, these findings do not

² Before referring to these neuroscientific results, we have to explain our stance towards the issue of naturalistic fallacy. We owe this point to the anonymous reviewer of the paper. We should explain the normative force of these factual results. The fact that we feel in a particular way does not mean that it is good to feel that way. It is a major challenge against neuroscientific and generally scientific studies of ethics. Our response here is based on the Ought Implies Can Principle, according to which, a moral theory is implausible if it is unrealistic for an average person, due to psychological and neurobiological constraints (SCHLEIM and SCHIRMANN 2011, 141). The study of brain capacity and procedures may allow us to reject some moral theories as being psychologically and neurobiologically unrealistic (CASEBEER and CHURCHLAND 2003, 171).

³ By memory in MacIntyre's view, we do not claim to remember all details of our past life, but significant orientations and shifts in these orientations that we have experienced in our past life.

show that the memories should be as far-reaching as a narrative account of life, which covers birth to death. These findings do not show that we need to recall our far remote episodes, in MacIntyre's term (1981, 208), longest-term intentions, and explain their connection to our present life to form an identity: "Hence the behavior is only characterized adequately when we know what the longer and longest-term intentions invoked are and how the shorter-term intentions are related to the longer."

On the other hand, there are other psychological and neuroscience findings, consistent with the above findings,⁴ which show moral capacity and moral traits have the strongest influence on the agent's sense of identity. Moral traits are the most central component of identity. Neurodegenerative diseases that impair moral capacity are the most powerful cases of identity change and identity loss. For instance, prefrontal cortex dysfunction causes moral impairments such as dishonesty, reduced empathy, and concern for social norms (STROHMINGER and NICHOLS 2015, 1470).

In their study, Strohminger and Nichols have investigated personal identity from a third-person point of view by asking the family members of patients with three neurodegenerative diseases, i.e., frontotemporal dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, about how much they sense that the patient is still the same person underneath. Their findings support the view that identity is at risk of deterioration during neurodegeneration primarily when the moral system is impaired (1477). According to this study, the moral faculty contributes to perceived identity more than does memory or non-psychological neural faculties such as voluntary motor control. The moral traits included in this study consist of values such as honesty, integrity, altruism, justice, mercy, and trustworthiness (1472).

These new psychological findings run counter to Locke's argument that memories of past experiences constitute personal identity. Thomas Reid and Joseph Butler reject this constitution thesis, but still hold that memory of past experiences provides the strongest evidence for a continuing self (KLEIN and NICHOLS 2012, 6). The emphasis of the neuroscientific studies mentioned above is on the role of moral traits, as memory might be lost in these diseases. The ideal situation is to have both, i.e., past memories and moral traits, but when there is a conflict, for instance in mental disorders, moral traits are more important in sustaining the sense of identity.

⁴ They are consistent as the former studies do not show that the memories should be as far-reaching as a narrative account of life, though they emphasize the importance of personal experience.

The reason we are referring to these empirical studies is that MacIntyre's account of narrative identity is, in some respects, similar to that of Locke. Placing different episodes of life in a unified narrative order requires a great deal of autobiographical and factual memory.⁵ We should recall who we were, what we did, what our reasons were. Failure to remember these contextual facts leads to the impossibility of narrative formation. If as these empirical studies show, moral traits can account for the perceived sense of identity, and moral traits as listed above can adequately be realized in sub-narratives of life, there is no need to take a unified narrative account of identity.

As was explained above, MacIntyre (1981, 203) takes the whole human life as the appropriate context for some virtues like integrity or constancy. In his view, we need a hierarchy of goods to make sense of some virtues such as justice and patience. And this hierarchy needs a narrative account of life.

Our response to this argument is like that of Strawson, explained earlier. Undoubtedly, our past influences us, but we do not need to be conscious of our past to make our current life intelligible. The way we order goods is partly influenced by our past experiences and the moral setting in which we have grown up. They set some criteria for us, which are open to revision. For instance, consider the virtue of patience in a family setting. How much disagreements and disputes in family life are borne and when they lead to divorce depends, in part, on the values and the cultural setting. Divorce is a more accessible option in an individualistic culture than in a collectivistic one. In either context, agents do not need to know the narratives of their lives to make intelligible decisions, though they are under their influence.

Also, from a third-person point of view, there is no need for such a broad context for these virtues. Who possesses integrity throughout his life, also shows integrity in her current episodes of life; and who shows integrity in her current life for a satisfactory continuous period would be counted as an agent with integrity, regardless of the overall shape of her life from the beginning until now. In other words, consistently revealing some virtues for a period of life would suffice for leading others to identify her as possessing those virtues, and thus as a particular persistent identity. Here again, we are appealing to the parsimony principle explained earlier.

⁵ We have a broad sense of facts here in mind, which includes knowledge of moral virtues and traits. Besides, facts are important from a moral point of view for forming identity. Major events in our life, like death, violence, abuse, and how we make sense of them are facts. The virtues and moral traits lead us to a particular interpretation and handling of these facts, which in the long term contributes to identity formation.

We can also appeal to MacIntyre's virtue ethics to support this point. MacIntyre, from an Aristotelian perspective, holds there is a relation between practical rationality and the virtues. For MacIntyre practical rationality itself is an intellectual virtue, *phronesis*. For MacIntyre (1981, 149), following Aristotle, the virtues are dispositions not only to act but also to feel in a particular way. Virtuous action requires the transformation of these inclinations such that the agent moves toward her good based on her cultivated desires. This means that the virtues constitute and affect practical rationality by taming the desires. The process of taming desires occurs in an apprentice/master relationship. Intellectual virtues like wisdom, intelligence, and prudence are acquired through teaching; moral virtues or the virtues of character like courage and justice are acquired by practice and habituation (MACINTYRE 1966, 64; 1981, 154).

J. McDowell (1979, 331–32) explains the role of the virtues in practical reasoning in terms of the reliable sensitivity that they bring about. He argues that a kind person or a virtuous person, in general, has “a reliable sensitivity” to the requirements of kindness in particular situations, letting him know when and how to behave kindly. The kind person has a “perceptual capacity”, yielding him the knowledge of the requirements of kindness in particular cases. In other words, having the virtues gives the agent a perceptual capability to recognize if a given situation requires behaving according to one virtue or another. This knowledge is not reducible to the application of the rules of moral action (MCDOWELL 1978, 14).

If the acquisition of the virtues requires taming of desires, it can occur in a life span shorter than the entire human life. In other words, human desires can be educated and controlled by following moral exemplars and observing moral rules gradually, especially, in adolescence and youth. When the desires are formed, they will lead us in our actions without requiring explicit practical reasoning. This agent does not need to have a unified narrative of her life for the acquisition and application of the virtues.

Indeed, the virtues of integrity and constancy, which MacIntyre places in the entire narrative of human life, can both be acquired and applied in shorter spans. A minimum threshold of the virtues required for identity formation and a sense of continuity would realize in life spans shorter than the entire human life. Besides, human identity might change during a lifetime, and the human being does not need to have a fixed identity from birth to death. There are many examples in the history of individuals who have experienced radical identity changes due to changes in their moral values and conduct.

However, their current value system is adequate for producing a sense of self-identity, without relation to their remote past and future, and having a story about the transition between these episodes. Nonetheless, having such a story would enrich our self-identity, but this story should not be regarded as the necessary part of a threshold for self-identity. Consistently and sincerely revealing moral virtues for some time, which might differ from person to person, plus a brief knowledge about her past, including her past changes, are adequate to yield a sense of identity in her view, and in others', too.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we criticized MacIntyre's view of identity formation. From an Aristotelian point of view, MacIntyre believes that in order to acquire identity, we must be able to narrate different periods of his life as a story and connect different parts of it. From this perspective, the concept of human good connects the different parts of human life. A sense of identity is achieved according to the place of the individual in this narrative, others' views of her, and the characteristics that are attributed to her. It is true that the first-person perspective is important and all external attributions should be interiorized to become part of our identity, but it is not clear how informed and conscious such a procedure is, and how open it is to revision. As MacIntyre (1981, 33) holds, in many traditional societies it is not possible to strip away social attributes from the self to discover "the real me". The border between "I" and "others" is not always clear, and the latter might be part of the former's substance.

In contrast, this view underestimates the role of individuality. Human actions and motives that underlie human identity may be based on reasons that do not derive their meaning from the concept of the good. Also, long-term intentions are not always necessary for identity formation. It is possible to form identity, based on short-term intentions and actions in shorter periods without understanding their connection with the whole human life. In fact, most people do not realize the general and integrated form of their life, but they have a sense of identity from their own perspective as well as from the perspective of others.

MacIntyre's emphasis on the role of others in identifying human beings downplays the role of the individual and individual initiatives and changes. A person can challenge the identity that others have reconstructed for her

and have a different perception of herself, even though this perception is not recognized by others.

Human beings are storytellers and give meaning to their life through the stories they narrate; however, the meaningfulness of life should not be confused with self-identity. People might cut or forget some parts of their narrative, and still have a persistent enough sense of self-identity. In fact, insisting on narrating past stories for the acquisition of self-identity might be related to depression, as these stories might shackle individuals to their past.

In this article, we referred to some empirical studies of neuroscience according to which the role of moral traits and characteristics in acquiring identity is greater than the role of remembering the past. Acquiring these moral qualities does not require a unified and narrative conception of human life but can be achieved in a shorter lifespan.

The emphasis on the role of unified narratives and others in identifying the individual might undermine her individuality and make her the captive of the society and her past life. In fact, it has been a challenge for this school of thought to balance the social and the individual, the old and the new. To this challenge, we respond that our initial capacity to think and judge is formed in the society, but by the same capacity, we will be able to revise the social norms which once have informed our identity.

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A CRITICISM OF ALASDAIR MACINTYRE'S ACCOUNT OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY A NEURO-PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Summary

In MacIntyre's view, the agent in order to have a consistent identity should be able to narrate a story about her life, which relates the different episodes of her life together. This story should explain the transition between these episodes. This story is based on the notion of the good of human beings. A notion of the good should be present in the agent's life to give a direction to her life. This integrity forms an identity for the agent. We intend to challenge this narrative view of identity in this paper. We will argue in this paper that though identity is formed in the eye of others, it does not need to be constituted in a unified narrative form, i.e., the agent does not need to place all episodes of her life in narrative order and have a consistent and unified account of her life, which includes her life from birth to death. Rather, shorter-term episodes of time suffice for identity formation. We will appeal to some findings of empirical psychology and neuroscience to support our claim.

Keywords: MacIntyre; identity; narrative; good; psychology.

KRYTYKA ALASDAIRA MACINTYRE'A KONCEPCJI O TOŻSAMOŚCI NARRACYJNEJ. PERSPEKTYWA NEUROFILOZOFICZNA

Streszczenie

W myśl koncepcji MacIntyre'a warunkiem posiadania przez sprawcę spójnej tożsamości jest zdolność przedstawienia swojego życia jako opowieści, która łączy w całość różne epizody jego życia. Opowieść ta powinna wyjaśniać związki między tymi epizodami. Opiera się ona na pojęciu dobra istot ludzkich. Pojęcie dobra powinno być obecne w życiu sprawcy, aby nadać kierunek jej życiu. Ta integralność tworzy tożsamość sprawcy. Autorzy kwestionują tę narracyjną koncepcję tożsamości. Jak argumentują, chociaż tożsamość kształtuje się w obecności innych, nie musi tworzyć jednolitej formy narracyjnej, tzn. sprawca nie musi umieszczać wszystkich epizodów swojego życia w porządku narracyjnym ani posiadać spójnego i jednolitego ujęcia swojego życia od chwili narodzin aż do śmierci. Do kształtowania tożsamości wystarczą krótsze epizody formacji. Autorzy odwołują się do niektórych ustaleń psychologii empirycznej i neuronauki, aby uzasadnić swoje stanowisko.

Słowa kluczowe: MacIntyre; tożsamość; narracja; dobro; psychologia.