

T

Lockean Persons, Self-Narratives, and Eudaimonia

Rossella Guerini, Massimo Marraffa

In this article we explore the ethical import of a naturalistic form of narrative constructivism that distances itself from both the non-naturalistic and antirealist strands in the theorizing on the self¹.

Our criticism builds on William James' theory of the self. On the one hand, there is the "I", which is a unifying, integrative, synthesizing process – the "selfing" or "I-ing" process. On the other hand, there is the product of this process, the "Me", which famously comes in three different forms of experiential reflexivity: the material, social, and spiritual Me.

Against this Jamesian backdrop, the claim that we constitute ourselves as morally responsible agents (as "Lockean persons") by forming and using autobiographical narratives is combined with the realist claim that the narrative self is not an idle wheel but a layer of personality that serves as a *causal* center of gravity in the history of the human psychobiological system. This alliance between narrative constructivism and self-realism takes shape in the context of a tradition of thought that views the synthesis of the various strata of personality as the highest developmental point of the selfing process – a viewpoint that aligns with an ethic that hinges on the idea of *eudaimonia*: the discovery and actualization of our unique potentials and talents.

¹ This form of narrative constructivism has been developed in M. Di Francesco-M. Marraffa-A. Paternoster, *The Self and Its Defenses*, Palgrave-Macmillan, London 2016.

1. *Lockean persons I: the consciousness criterion*

In the second edition of the *Essay* Locke famously argues that person is a “forensic” notion and that the best way to capture its normative implications is through understanding it as a psychological category whose central concept is self-consciousness².

In this perspective, the concept of person is not an essence but rather a psychosocial attribute that is assigned to those subjects who possess a specific set of psychological capacities. This is in agreement with the most common legal language, which suitably speaks about “natural persons” and similarly about “legal persons”, thus pointing out something precise, i.e., the presence of an agent or subject who, in virtue of his intrinsic characteristics, is fully able to perform such acts as buying real estate, making a donation or a will, or paying taxes. Here the acting subject is a person precisely to the extent that he can be held (ethically even before legally) responsible for what he does. And he is thus imputable as well: if he committed a crime, he knew very well what he was doing. The concept of person therefore rests on that of *personal responsibility*; it is easy to see, even intuitively, that the concept of responsibility rests on the concept of self-consciousness, seen precisely as awareness of one’s own acts, and hence as *critical appropriation* of one’s own projects, actions, and memories. An individual can make a will only if he is a person – and indeed a child cannot make a will, nor even an elderly person who suffers from dementia; they are not sufficiently responsible inasmuch as they are not sufficiently aware of the meaning, scope and consequences of their actions.

Thus, as just been hinted, the Lockean person is someone who possesses a set of psychological capacities. It is someone who is able to form imaginary test scenarios in order to make a planning evaluation of what can happen as a consequence of his actions. But above all it is someone who is able to grasp himself not only as a material agent in his own present, past and future acts as “public” acts, but also as an entity who has inwardness, i.e., an inner experiential space in which thoughts and affects can be situated as “private” events. Only someone with sufficient access to his own interiority (to himself as objectified in the introspective consciousness of the self) can appropriate «Actions and their Merits»³.

² J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975 (orig. ed. 1694).

³ *Ivi*, p. 346.

In Locke, therefore, an individual is a person only insofar as he can reflectively appropriate his actions and their meaning – an appropriation that originates from «that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking»⁴. The philosopher also realizes that the identity of persons «is not determined by identity or diversity of substance, which it cannot be sure of, but only by identity of consciousness»⁵. The Lockean consciousness is thus a “secular” notion; it is not a substance, and it severs ties with the soul.

A question arises, however: if the identity of persons is determined by consciousness, by what is consciousness determined? Locke makes appeal to (introspective) consciousness as the most psychological and less metaphysical notion he can conceive to define the concepts of person and identity. On closer view, however, this consciousness is a “strong” stand-in for the soul; it is, actually, still a sort of secularized soul. Despite the philosopher’s good intentions, it is also described as a sort of essence. For all that, Locke’s consciousness is still given a priori.

A different kind of consciousness can be found in psychological sciences: something that is constructed during life, which emerges from the multifarious qualities of the body and of human existence. It is from this standpoint that Locke’s notion of personal identity will be reconsidered in the Section 4.

2. *James’ I/Me distinction and McAdams’ personological view of narrative identity*

In his seminal chapter on the “Consciousness of Self” James takes the Lockean analysis of the self one step further⁶.

According to James, the self is a *process*, «the process of reflexivity which emanates from the dialectic between the “I” and “Me”»⁷. This is well captured by the personality psychologist Dan McAdams. He opposes his interpretation of James’ theory of the self to the postmodernist theorizing on identity. According to Kenneth Gergen, for example, the postmodern identity is multiple, shattered, bereft of any reality except for what is

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 335.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 345.

⁶ W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover, New York 1950 (orig. ed. 1890).

⁷ V. Gecas, *The Self-Concept*, in «Annual Review of Sociology», 8 (1982), pp. 1-33, p. 3.

socially constructed from time to time in everyday interactions⁸. And in his view, it's all to the good: actually the multiplicity of the self (which he describes as the "multiphrenic condition") is to be accentuated in order to allow the subject to expand itself in different directions, to evolve and to create ever new opportunities of personal growth. McAdams takes issue with Gergen: the latter misses a fundamental aspect of selfhood, namely, the process of synthesizing the disparate elements that constitute the post-modern identity. This unifying activity corresponds to James' concept of the self as subject or "I"⁹.

In this perspective, the I is not a thing, not even a part, a component or an aspect of the self: «[it] is really more like a verb; it might be called "selfing" or "I-ing", the fundamental process of making a self out of experience»¹⁰. The "Me" is instead «the primary product of the selfing process»; it is «the self that selfing makes»¹¹. The Me consists in three forms of reflexive experientiality – the material, social and spiritual selves – which originate from the selfing process. It is «the making of the Me that constitutes what the I fundamentally is»¹².

James' I/Me distinction provides thus a definition of self-consciousness in terms of identity: self-consciousness is a self-describing, an identity forming, which is a unifying, integrative, synthesizing process. In this perspective, James anticipates a number of theories in developmental and personality psychology that have made appeal to a general organismic process for integrating subjective experience, – e.g., Werner's orthogenetic principle, Piaget's organization, and Jung's individuation¹³. While these various concepts differ from each other in important ways, they converge on the idea that human experience tends toward a fundamental sense of unity in that human beings apprehend experience through an integrative selfing process.

* * *

⁸ K.J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, Basic Books, New York 1991.

⁹ D.P. McAdams, *The Case for Unity in the (Post)Modern Self: a Modest Proposal*, in R.D. Ashmore-L. Jussim (eds.), *Self and Identity. Fundamental Issues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997, pp. 46-78.

¹⁰ D.P. McAdams, *Personality, Modernity, and the Storied Self: a Contemporary Framework for Studying Persons*, in «Psychological Inquiry», 7 (1996), n. 4, pp. 295-321, p. 302.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² D.P. McAdams-K.S. Cox, *Self and Identity Across the Life Span*, in R.M. Lerner (ed.), *The Handbook of Life-Span Development*, Wiley, New York 2010, vol. 2, pp. 158-207, p. 162.

¹³ See R.M. Ryan, *Psychological Needs and the Facilitation of Integrative Processes*, in «Journal of Personality», 63 (1995), n. 3, pp. 397-427.

In McAdams' influential life-story model of identity, James' I/Me distinction is combined with Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Henry Murray's research program on the Study of Lives. Narrative identity is here defined as the internalized and evolving story of the self¹⁴ which integrates the reconstructed past and the imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity, purpose and meaning. That is, people make sense of their own lives through narrative structures (such as characters, roles, scenes, scripts, and plots) which make the Me into «an internalized drama»¹⁵.

Most importantly, McAdams views narrative identity as a layer of personality. Within his conceptual framework for conceptualizing the whole person across the life span¹⁶, narrative identity hinges on two other cognitive layers. The first consists of a small set of broad *dispositional traits* implicated in social life (including the so-called "Big Five") which account for consistencies in behavioral style from one situation to the next and over time. The second layer consists of a wide range of *characteristic adaptations* (including goals, strivings, personal projects, values, interests, defense mechanisms, coping strategies, relational schemata) which capture more socially contextualized and motivational aspects of psychological individuality. During personality development, people's internalized and evolving life stories are layered over characteristic adaptations, which are, in turn, layered over dispositional traits. And this process of layering may be *integrative*: the process of selfing may succeed in bringing traits, skills, goals, values, and experiences into a meaningful life story.

Building upon Erikson's seminal approach to identity development, McAdams argued that the selfing process begins to arrange the Me into a self-defining narrative in adolescence, partly as a function of societal expectations regarding identity and the maturation of formal operational thinking¹⁷. Constructing and internalizing a life story provides an answer to Erikson's key identity questions – questions regarding who one is, how one came to be and where one is going in life.

¹⁴ «[T]he broad narrative of the Me that the I[-ing] composes, edits, and continues to work on» (D.P. McAdams-K.S. Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ D.P. McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, Guilford Press, New York-London 2015.

¹⁷ D.P. McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity*, Dorsey Press, Homewood (IL) 1985.

The earliest drafts of narrative identity may take the form of what has been called “the personal fable”, i.e., the adolescent’s grandiose fantasies about accomplishment, fame, or notoriety in the future¹⁸. But later drafts become more realistic and tempered, as reality testing improves and narrative skills become further refined. Habermas and Bluck (2000) have shown how adolescents gradually master the social-cognitive skills required for constructing a coherent narrative of the self¹⁹. By the end of their teenaged years, they regularly engage in sophisticated forms of *autobiographical reasoning*.

Autobiographical reasoning is a constructive and interpretative activity that relies on the life story format for drawing connections between remembered events and enduring and current characteristics of the self. This activity is based on four social-cognitive capabilities: (i) the ability to put past events in temporal order (temporal coherence); (ii) the ability to think about the self in abstract terms (i.e., as embodying certain personality traits) and account for changes or developments in the self over time (causal-motivational coherence); (iii) the ability to summarize and interpret themes within stories and apply these to one’s own life (thematic coherence); and (iv) having normative expectations, shaped as they are by both biology and culture, regarding how a typical life is structured (the “cultural concept of biography”). Although a life narrative begins to emerge in middle childhood, temporal and causal-motivational coherence increase substantially across adolescence up to early adulthood, as does thematic coherence, which continues to develop throughout middle adulthood²⁰.

It is to be observed that autobiographical reasoning is *constitutive* of narrative identity. Embedding personal memories in a culturally, temporally, causally and thematically coherent life story, the life story format establishes and re-establishes the diachronic continuity of the self²¹.

¹⁸ See D. Ikind, *Egocentrism in Adolescence*, in «Child Development», 38 (1967), n. 4, pp. 1025-1034.

¹⁹ T. Habermas-S. Bluck, *Getting a Life: The Emergence of the Life Story in Adolescence*, in «Psychological Bulletin», 126 (2000), n. 5, pp. 748-769.

²⁰ See C. Köber-F. Schmiedek-T. Habermas, *Characterizing Lifespan Development of Three Aspects of Coherence in Life Narratives: A Cohort-sequential Study*, in «Developmental Psychology», 51 (2015), n. 2, pp. 260-275.

²¹ T. Habermas-C. Köber, *Autobiographical Reasoning Is Constitutive for Narrative Identity: the Role of the Life Story for Personal Continuity*, in K.C. McLean-M. Syed (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2015, pp. 149-165; Idd., *Autobiographical Reasoning in Life Narratives Buffers the Effect of Biographical disruptions on the sense of self-continuity*, in «Memory», 23 (2015), n. 5, pp. 664-674.

3. *Lockean persons II: the self-narrative criterion*

The claim that the type of continuity that connects psychological states across time in an identity-constituting way is specifically narrative in character is typically associated with concerns about *practical identity* (i.e., personal identity considered in its connection to ethical concerns, as Locke's theory of person does). The claim is that we constitute ourselves as Lockean persons by forming and using autobiographical narratives. The unity of a person is the unity of an autobiographical narrative.

In some cases, narrative accounts of personal identity are characterized in opposition to what has been, at least until quite recently, the most popular view of personal identity: a significantly amended version of Locke's relational memory criterion²². Here the question is one of "reidentification": on what basis should we reidentify a person as numerically the same despite qualitative differences over time or under different descriptions? Answering such a question calls for a criterion of diachronic numerical identity, a criterion of what makes something one and the same thing as itself at different times. But when the focus shifts from solely metaphysical puzzles about the persistence of complex objects (such as the ship of Theseus) to the relation between identity and practical and evaluative concerns, the question becomes one of "characterization": which characteristics (character traits, motivations, values, mental and bodily capacities and dispositions, emotional attachments, commitments, memories, and so on) make a person the particular person that she is? Such a question concerns «identity in the sense of what is generally called, following Erikson, an "identity crisis"»²³.

According to the proponents of the narrative view, an answer to the question of characterization may proceed in two steps. First, those activities of *self-interpretation* and *self-creation* that are central to our experience of being persons – so central that to many continuation without them (say, in a severely demented or vegetative state) is as bad as death – are built into the kind of continuity that connects person A and person B across time in an identity-constituting way²⁴. Second, what enables persons

²² See D. Shoemaker, *Personal Identity and Ethics*, in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/identity-ethics/>>.

²³ M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, Cornell UP, Ithaca 1996, p. 2.

²⁴ See, e.g., C. Korsgaard, *Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Response to Parfit*, in «Philosophy and Public Affairs» 18 (1989), n. 2, pp. 109-123; D. De Grazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2005.

to be actively self-interpreting and self-creating agents is identified with the construction of *self-narratives*²⁵.

This narrative thesis, however, comes in different forms. Authors such as Alisdair Macintyre and Charles Taylor view the person as a self-interpreting being in a sense inspired by the hermeneutical tradition, namely a tradition that is largely foreign to naturalistic commitments²⁶. A psychologically plausible narrativist account of personal identity requires a view of self-interpretation as an activity of narrative reappropriation of the products of the unconscious processing – an activity implemented by apparatuses such as Dennett’s Joycean machine or Gazzaniga’s interpreter module or Carruthers’ mindreading system²⁷. In this perspective, persons are self-interpreting beings in a psychological sense that is congenial to Locke’s forensic view of personal identity, but fundamentally foreign to the hermeneutical tradition. From our point of view the problem is that a hermeneutical notion of self-interpretation, insofar as it puts exclusive emphasis upon meaning (i.e., the intentional directing of consciousness) at the expense of the psychobiological theme of the unconscious, surreptitiously reintroduces the pre-psychoanalytic, pre-cognitivist, idealistic conception of the conscious subject as primary subject²⁸.

Things are similarly problematic in the case of the most rigorous psychoanalytic hermeneutics. Ricœur made a significant attempt to conciliate between Freud’s metapsychology and hermeneutics²⁹. For this philosopher investigated how psychoanalysis allows for both the hermeneutical theme of meaning and intentionality and the objective and biological theme of drive causality. Within this framework, Ricœur rejects the versions of psychoanalytic interpretation which are unilaterally aimed at the subjective or intersubjective reconstruction of meaning, in keeping with the standards of interpretive conventionalism. According to the latter, interpretation is ultimately committed to the freedom of deciding the meaning of the text on

²⁵ See J.W. Schroer-R. Schroer, *Getting the Story Right: a Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity*, in «Philosophical Studies», 171 (2014), pp. 445-469.

²⁶ A. Macintyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1984; C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Harvard UP, Cambridge (MA) 1989.

²⁷ D.C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Little Brown, Boston 1991; M. Roser-M.S. Gazzaniga, *Automatic Brains. Interpretive Minds*, in «Current Directions in Psychological Science», 13 (2004), n. 2, pp. 56-59; P. Carruthers, *The Opacity of Mind*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2011.

²⁸ See G. Jervis, *La psicoanalisi come esercizio critico*, Garzanti, Milan 1989.

²⁹ P. Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Yale UP, New Haven 1970 (orig. ed. 1965).

the strength of the agreement reached by the participants to the interpretive operation. But in this way the problems of truth and reality, of adequacy and verification, tend to disappear, being replaced by a freely creative narrativism of postmodernist type³⁰.

Ricœur's attempt at synthesis, however, remains within a conception of the unconscious that must be rejected. He coins the term "anti-phenomenology" to define Freud's methodological approach. According to Ricœur, Freud's establishment of the unconscious is «an *epoch* in reverse» because «what is initially best known, the conscious, is suspended and becomes the least known»³¹. Consequently, whereas the phenomenological tradition pursues a reduction of phenomena *to* consciousness, capturing them as its objects, Freud's methodological approach aims at a reduction *of* consciousness: the latter loses the Cartesian character of first and last certainty, which stops the chain of methodical doubts on the real, and becomes itself an object of doubt. Psychoanalysis becomes thus a *demystifying hermeneutics*. This project of *demystification* – the systematic search for self-deception and the uncovering of underlying truth – is at the core of the critical tradition to which Freud belongs: the "unmasking trend" that has been part of European thought from La Rochefoucauld through Enlightenment philosophers, Marx, Nietzsche, and Ibsen³².

There is a problem, however. Freud's inquiry into the unconscious actually starts from consciousness taken as *given*, and this makes psychoanalysis a dialectical variant of phenomenology. In contrast, a dynamic psychology informed by the cognitive sciences is not vulnerable to this objection: it aims to pick up the critical content of psychoanalysis – its being a demystifying project – but within a framework where consciousness is at issue and the unconscious is understood in terms of an conception of the relationship between the subpersonal and personal levels of analysis in which the former is always in a dialectical relationship with the latter³³.

Certainly, even if we define self-interpretation as a re-appropriation of the products of the human information-processing machinery, self-narratives are *not* merely the result of the workings of a psychobiological apparatus. Socio-cultural variables may significantly modulate the construction

³⁰ See M.N. Eagle, *The Postmodern Turn in Psychoanalysis: A Critique*, in «Psychoanalytic Psychology», 20 (2003), n. 3, pp. 411-424.

³¹ P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1970 (orig. ed. 1965), p. 118.

³² H.F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Basic Books, New York 1970, p. 537.

³³ See M. Di Francesco-M. Marraffa-A. Paternoster, *op. cit.*, ch. I.

of psychological self-consciousness. Data from cultural psychology and ethnopsychiatry show that people living in small-scale societies possess a self-consciousness that is primarily physical and social rather than psychological. The construction of psychological self-consciousness requires a repertoire of conceptual and (indissolubly) lexical tools of an abstract kind. As hinted above, the capacity to think in a hypothetico-deductive manner enables to grasp one's inner life in terms of autobiography. By contrast, the intelligence of adult illiterates living in small-scale societies is entirely focused on immediate practical experience, and therefore lacks the necessary resources to make the complete shift from a physical to a psychological form of self-consciousness³⁴.

Yet, whereas the narrative theorists of personal identity tend to make the socially and historically situated narrative self *the* foundational aspect of human selfhood, we think that the narrative self is only one of the three dimensions of the Jamesian Me, which evolves from the bodily subjectivity. This point emerges very clearly from Mark Howe and Mary Courage's account of the genesis of autobiographical memory³⁵.

Most of the theories of autobiographical memory development have been cast in terms of understanding why infantile amnesia ends (and presumably true autobiographical memory begins) at the beginning of the preschool period. According to Howe and Courage, children lack a critical cognitive or social-cognitive framework before that period that would enable them to encode memories in such a way that they could later be retrieved as self relevant. This framework is self-consciousness, as commonly measured in the mirror task of self-recognition. Before children pass the task at about 18 months to 2 years, they are not capable of encoding and storing memories as self relevant. As a consequence, there is no *auto* in autobiographical. Later, when trying to retrieve these memories from the perspective of things that happened to "me", they are unsuccessful because they did not yet have a 'me' to which to attach the memory.

Now, we agree with Howe and Courage that the most important factor in the emergence of autobiographical memory is self-consciousness as measured in the mirror self-recognition task. However, we take issue with the

³⁴ See M. Marraffa-C. Meini, *From Piaget to Bowlby – and Back Again*, in «Paradigmi», 35 (2017), n. 3, in press.

³⁵ M.L. Howe-M.L. Courage, *On Resolving the Enigma of Infantile Amnesia*, in «Psychological Bulletin», 113 (1993), pp. 305-326; M.L. Howe, *The Co-emergence of the Self and Autobiographical Memory*, in P.J. Bauer-R. Fivush (eds.), *The Wiley Handbook on the Development of Children's Memory*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken (NJ) 2014, pp. 545-567.

authors' construal of the fixed referent as a "cognitive self-concept" because we agree with those researchers who take mirror recognition as a marker of *bodily* self-consciousness³⁶, and hence reject the claim according to which children's mark-directed behavior is evidential of an introspective form of self-consciousness and a self-concept inherently linked to understanding the mental states of other people³⁷. Our sense of ourselves in time is rooted in the onset of a *physical* form of self-describability: the nonverbal, analogic representation of the bodily self constructed in the second year of life acts as a fixed referent around which personally experienced event memories begin to be organized.

The Me to which the subject begins to attach episodic memories is thus the Jamesian material self. With the permission of the postmodernist reflection on identity, self-narratives do not create selves. The autobiographical self as a continuity across time and space, interpreted reflectively by the agent, would not arise without the bodily subjectivity. Bodily self and narrative self are two different kinds of experiential unity produced by the dialectic between the I and the Me.

4. *Realism about the self: autonomy and individuation*

In this process of narrative self-construction there is an essential psychodynamic ingredient.

During very early childhood, and especially from the third year of life, self-consciousness may go beyond the bodily subjectivity to become psychological self-description, and later, narrative self-description. This description of the self that the young child feverishly pursues is an "accepting description", i.e., a description that is indissolubly cognitive (as a *definition* of self) and emotional-affective (as an *acceptance* of self). In practice, therefore, affective growth and the construction of identity cannot be separated. The child needs a clear and consistent capacity to describe herself – a capacity which is fully legitimized by caregivers, and socially valid.

On the other hand, this will continue to be the case throughout the en-

³⁶ See, e.g., D.J. Povinelli, *The self: Elevated in Consciousness and Extended in Time*, in C. Moore-K. Lemmon (eds.), *The Self in Time: Developmental Perspectives*, Erlbaum, Mahwah (NJ) 2001, pp. 75-95.

³⁷ See, e.g., J.P. Keenan-G.C. Jr. Gallup-D. Falk, *The Face in the Mirror*, Ecco, New York 2003.

ture life cycle. Adolescent crisis, and together with it the process of social autonomization in post-adolescence, is largely a problem of identity. In Erikson's theory of identity development, evoked above by Schechtman, the fundamental problem of adolescence lies in moving from a *heteronomous* identity to an *autonomous* self-definition. This requires an identity synthesis, i.e., a reworking of childhood identifications into a larger, self-determined set of self-identified ideals. The optimal outcome of such a process is a kind of dialectic balance in which the ego syntonic pole of identity synthesis is predominant over the ego dystonic pole of identity confusion (i.e., an inability to develop a workable set of ideals on which to base an adult identity).

Erikson sees identity confusion as an insufficient integration of self-images originating from a "weakness of the ego"³⁸. This claim leads us into the psychopathological dimension of the inextricable link between identity self-description and self-consciousness. One cannot ascribe concreteness and solidity to one's own self-consciousness if it does not possess at its center, and as its essence, a description of identity that must be clear and, inextricably, "good", in the sense of being worthy of love³⁹. If the self-description becomes uncertain, the subject soon loses the feeling of being present.

We can say then that the incessant construction and reconstruction of an acceptable and adaptively functioning identity is the process that produces our intra- and inter-personal balances, and is thus the foundation of psychological well-being and mental health. And this process is the ongoing construction of a system of defenses, the continuously renovated capacity to curb and cope with anxiety and disorder⁴⁰. Consider, for example, the above-mentioned autobiographical reasoning. This is essentially a mechanism to compensate for threats of self-discontinuity. In circumstances of relative stability, personal sameness in time or personal stability may be established by the mechanism whereby the remembered self is systematically distorted by automatically assimilating it to the present self-concept, increasing the similarity between the present and remem-

³⁸ It is to be noticed that in this context Freud's *das Ich* is taken as a synthetic function, a synthesizing process, and thus coinciding with selfing. See D.P. McAdams, *The Case for Unity...*, cit., p. 57.

³⁹ See M. Balint, *Primary Love and Psycho-Analytic Technique*, Tavistock, London 1965, pp. 90-108 (orig. ed. 1937).

⁴⁰ See G. Jervis, *Contro il sentito dire. Psicoanalisi, psichiatria e politica*, edited by M. Marraffa, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2014.

bered reflected self, in order to maintain conceptual self-sameness⁴¹. When change is acknowledged, however, such a mechanism fails to create self-continuity. In circumstances of biographical change, the diachronic continuity of the self can be re-established by autobiographical reasoning through arguments that spell out transformations and their motives⁴².

The selfing process imposes thus a teleology of self-defense on the human psychobiological system; and here is where the argument for a realist view of the self takes off. The self is the process of reflexivity which emanates from the dialectic between the Jamesian I and Me. And unlike the continuously self-rewriting autobiographies of Dennett's Joycean machine⁴³, the storied Me that the selfing process makes is not an epiphenomenon, but rather a layer of personality that serves as a *causal* center of gravity in the history of the system⁴⁴.

Conceiving narrative identity as a causally efficacious layer of personality pre-empts a standard antirealist objection. Narrativism, so the objection goes, is an approach that puts normative constraints on our self-narratives – constraints such as “narrative coherence”. But what prevents from suspecting that «a person may possess a completely coherent self-identity that is nevertheless false»⁴⁵? Realists are thus required to offer criteria by which they can distinguish between self-narratives that are truthful and those that are confabulated, self-deceptive, or paranoid⁴⁶. And here is where a personological view of the narrative self comes into play.

As seen above (§2), during personality development, internalized and evolving stories of the self layer over adaptations, which layer over traits, and this process of layering may be *integrative*: «Traits capture the actor's dramaturgical present; goals and values project the agent into the future. An autobiographical author enters the developmental picture [...] to inte-

⁴¹ M.A. Conway-J.A. Singer-A. Tagini, *The Self and Autobiographical Memory: Correspondence and Coherence*, in «Social Cognition», 22 (2004), n. 5, pp. 495-537.

⁴² See T. Habermas-C. Köber, *Autobiographical Reasoning is Constitutive for Narrative Identity*, cit.; Idd., *Autobiographical Reasoning in Life Narratives Buffers...*, cit.

⁴³ These autobiographies are only «a confabulatory byproduct of the decentralized brain activity that actually regulates behavior» (J. Ismael, *Saving the Baby: Dennett on Autobiography, Agency, and the Self*, in «Philosophical Psychology», 19 (2006), n. 3, pp. 345-360, p. 346).

⁴⁴ See O. Flanagan, *Consciousness Reconsidered*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1992, p. 195; J. Ismael, *Saving the baby*, cit., p. 353; M. Di Francesco-M. Marraffa-A. Paternoster, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

⁴⁵ K. Kristjánsson, *The Self and its Emotions*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2010, p. 39.

⁴⁶ See S. Matthews-J. Kennett, *Truth, Lies, and the Narrative Self*, in «American Philosophical Quarterly», 49 (2012), n. 4, pp. 301-315.

grate the reconstructed past with the experienced present and envisioned future»⁴⁷. The selfing process, then, takes the form of what Jung identified as individuation, namely, a search for itself that strives for a synthesis of the various strata of personality⁴⁸.

Such a process has an ethical dimension that is reminiscent of the Aristotelian ideal of *eudaimonia*. Most relevantly for our purposes, *eudaimonia* can be reinterpreted in terms of identity⁴⁹. The good life can be seen, with Aristotle, as the *telos* at which the best human conduct aims but, differently than Aristotle, as a *telos* not preordained to the individual but immanent to the vicissitudes of one's mental life. To act in accordance with virtue cannot mean to perform well the task most typical of the human being *in general*, but to perform well «the task of maintaining the integrity of one's identity in the plurality of situations one encounters and of expressing the salient traits of one's identity in a unique biography»⁵⁰. Although this task confronts every person, its content varies from individual to individual and cannot be known a priori: «The good life or *eudaimonia* [...] is then a life-course in which one is able to enrich the main plot of one's life-narrative with the largest possible amount of episodes and sub-plots compatible with the preservation of a sense of overall unity. The ability to unify one's biography into a coherent narrative is a good which plays a similar role to *eudaimonia* for Aristotle»⁵¹.

In this personological and eudaimonic framework⁵², a criterion that affords a distinction of self-knowledge from self-deception becomes available. Deceptive self-narratives are those that fail to integrate with the other layers of personality. Telling a coherent self-story is then not enough: a fully coherent but false self-narrative is a “façade” marked by bad faith, something inauthentic which tends to pass itself off as the “deep” structure of the person. Such a narrative is an idle wheel within the process of individuation.

The model of self-knowledge implied here is psychotherapeutic as well

⁴⁷ D.P. McAdams, *Tracing Three Lines of Personality Development*, in «Research in Human Development», 12 (2015), nn. 3-4, pp. 224-228, p. 226.

⁴⁸ C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, *Psychological Types*, Routledge, London 1971 (orig. ed.).

⁴⁹ A. Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity: Rethinking the Project of Modernity*, Routledge, London 1998.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 31.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Research on *eudaimonia* and eudaimonic well-being has proliferated recently in personality psychology. For a review, see A.S. Waterman, *Eudaimonic Identity Theory: Identity as Self-discovery*, in S.J. Schwartz-K. Luyckx-V.L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, Springer, Berlin 2011, pp. 357-379.

as ethical. Biographies may be soliloquies, but they are also presented socially. This typically occurs in psychotherapy, and biographies serve then as vehicles for negotiations of identity⁵³. In this perspective, the construction of a self-narrative characterized by the Lockean critical appropriation of one's own actions and mentations (§1) can be seen as a patient-therapist exchange of autobiographical arguments (§2) in which illusions and self-deceptions are rooted out and dispelled. This can be seen as an exercise of demystifying hermeneutics whose criterion of objectivity lies in a dynamic psychology driven by the cognitive sciences. In this psychotherapeutic context, the individual's "actual self" – what Flanagan called the "actual full identity"⁵⁴ – is the life story as told from the "ideally objective standpoint" of a subpersonal theory which is always in dialectical relationship with the personal level of analysis (§3)⁵⁵.

5. Conclusions

This article explored the ethical import of a naturalistic and realist version of the narrative view of the self.

First, we distanced from the non-naturalistic strands in the hermeneutical conception of narrative identity by making a case for a demystifying approach which finds its criterion of objectivity in a dynamic psychology informed by the cognitive sciences.

Second, we made a case for realism about the Jamesian duplex self since the process of self-representation originated from the I/Me dialectic is not an idle wheel but a causal center of gravity in the history of the agent. Antirealists underestimate this point. Dennett, for example, affirms that the self only serves «to solve the myriad *little problems of interpersonal activity* we encounter every day, from the moment of our birth»⁵⁶. In con-

⁵³ See J.M. Doris, *Talking to Our Selves*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2015.

⁵⁴ Actual full identity is «the self as seen from the point of view of a certain class of theoretical perspectives that admit the reality of the self as an emergent phenomenon and try to give an objective account of what it, in general and in particular, is like» (O. Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism*, Harvard UP, Cambridge (MA) 1991, p. 137).

⁵⁵ Thus we take very seriously Owen Flanagan's worry that theories from cognitive sciences may «couch the explanation of action in unfamiliar scientific terms, not in terms of the theory of action framed in the common sense language of ideals and commitments» (review of K. Kristjánsson, *The Self and its Emotions*, in «Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews», 2012, <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/35356-the-self-and-its-emotions/>>).

⁵⁶ D.C. Dennett, *Artifactual selves: A response to Lynn Rudder Baker*, in «Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences», 15 (2016), n. 1, pp. 17-20, p. 16; italics ours.

trast, findings from developmental, dynamic, social and personality psychology show that our entire life takes shape in accordance with a primary need to exist solidly as *unitary* subjects.

The integrative selfing process gives rise to different kinds of unity, corresponding to the different aspects of the Me-self. The most minimal form of the Me is bodily self-awareness; the storied Me arises from such a material self. On the other hand, it is the psychological unity – and notably the unity of an autobiographical narrative – that constitutes ourselves as Lockean persons. The most fundamental unity is the integration of the personality layers, in agreement with an ethic hinged on the ideal of eudaimonia – the discovery and actualization of one's own unique potentials and talents.

Abstract

In this article we explore the ethical import of a naturalistic form of narrative constructivism that distances itself from both the non-naturalistic and antirealist strands in theorizing on the self. Our criticism builds on William James' theory of the self. Against this Jamesian backdrop, the claim that we constitute ourselves as morally responsible agents (as "Lockean persons") by forming and using autobiographical narratives is combined with the realist claim that the narrative self is not an idle wheel but a layer of personality that serves as a causal center of gravity in the history of the human psychobiological system. This alliance between narrative constructivism and self-realism takes shape in the context of a tradition of thought that views the synthesis of the various strata of personality as the highest developmental point of the selfing process – a viewpoint that aligns with an ethic that hinges on the idea of eudaimonia: the discovery and actualization of our unique potentials and talents.

Keywords: eudaimonia; demystifying hermeneutics; individuation; narrative identity; personality; realism about the self; William James' I/Me distinction.

Massimo Marraffa

Dipartimento di Filosofia, Comunicazione e Spettacolo
Università Roma Tre
massimo.marraffa@uniroma3.it

Rossella Guerini

Dipartimento di Filosofia, Comunicazione e Spettacolo
Università Roma Tre
rossella.guerini@uniroma3.it