

20. Schechtman 2007, The narrative self-constitution view

Kevin Dorst
kevindorst@pitt.edu

PHIL 0450

Psychological criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff B at t_2 is psychologically continuous with A .

There's a series of psychologically connected steps from A at t_1 to B at t_2 .

Bodily criterion: Person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff they have the same body.

Four features that personal identity is meant to track: (1) moral responsibility, (2) prudential concern, (3) just compensation, and (4) survival.

These are generally taken to favor the psychological criterion over the bodily one. E.g. psychology swap: the prince and the cobbler.

Schechtman: the psychological criterion gives *too weak* a connection. It's not because I'm *like* someone who will experience pain that I dread it; it's because I *am* them.

Fission cases dramatize. Want *more* than psychological connectedness.

Short-branch version: teleporter that makes a duplicate and damages the original, who will die shortly after.

Parfit: we're mistaken; what we want to happen *never* happens.

Schechtman: we need to look to *further features* that distinguish persons from mere animals.

People narrativize! We understand things by telling stories.

Especially temporally-extended things like history or politics.

To varying degrees (across time/people), this includes ourselves.

How did I get here?
What am I doing?
Where am I going?

Our experiences are conditioned by our answers to questions like this.
→ We experience the present in the context of a larger life-narrative.

The door. You're walking up concrete steps toward a red door, along a path lined by bushes, a potted plant to the left, a bicycle to the right, a corny "Welcome Home" mat by the door. How does it feel?

Depends on whether it's *your* house vs. your *new* house vs. your *family* house (coming to visit) vs. your family house (saying goodbye) vs. your *partner's* house (the first time) vs. your *ex-partner's* house (the last time) vs....

Similarly, working away on an exhausting project. How it feels depends on whether it's for an exciting new career-step, vs. a dead-end job.

The narrative-self-constitution view: We constitute ourselves as persons by forming a (largely implicit and automatic, though occasionally explicit) narrative self-conception according to which we experience and organize our lives.

Schechtman doesn't give an explicit criterion, but it may go something like: person A at t_1 is person B at t_2 iff A and B have the same narrative.

We do this by *appropriating* or *identifying with* remembered-past and anticipated-future experiences.

→ This is a matter of degree. Personal narratives can be more or less "tightly woven".

→ Living out the same story is the deep connection we wanted!

If this is right, it suggests that people *can* survive radical psychological breaks.

Perhaps, with the right mindset, I could survive the K-transformer.

But is it this easy? Return to the short-branch fission case...