

Introduction

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Although scholars studying the identity of persons usually address diverging issues and have different research agendas, there is a growing awareness that one may benefit from insights and results present in other disciplines dealing with that subject. This explains the enthusiastic responses to the invitation of the Netherlands School for Research in Practical Philosophy and the Institute for Ethics of the Vrije Universiteit to participate in a seminar on 'Personal and Moral Identity'.

It is a great pleasure to me to introduce this volume to its readers. Although I fulfil this task on behalf of the editorial team that comprises, besides myself, Wouter van Haaften, Ben Spiecker and Marc Slors, I am solely responsible for the introduction's contents. It is a great pleasure because writing an introduction offers the opportunity not only to present the separate chapters, but also to draw attention to convergence between the disciplines studying the subject of identity, common themes, shared problems and chances for further fruitful interdisciplinary exchanges.

Let me start by characterising the participants in the research area of (personal and moral) identity. The participants come from psychology and philosophy – diverse disciplines, each with their own approaches: empirical and explanatory in the case of psychology, and metaphysical and normative in the case of philosophy. Besides that, neither psychology nor philosophy are unified disciplines. Both show a variety of theoretical approaches, developed to answer particular questions, and often well entrenched in distinct sub-disciplines with their own scholarly journals. The philosophy of mind is focused on criteria for the identification and re-identification of persons in different time-slices or stages. Moral philosophy and the philosophy of education share an interest in the constitution and development of identity in individual moral persons. Constructivist theories in psychology, for example, are more interested in the processes of identity

development and in the social and cultural factors determining the outcome than in the content, the distinctive features of a person's identity. Post-modernist – philosophical and psychological – theories are more anxious to reveal the influence of power structures on identity formation and to deconstruct 'alienated' identity than to tell us what should be done to further the development of a non-alienated identity. When scholars from such diverse disciplines meet, usually you get a Babel-like confusion. I won't deny that this happened from time to time during the seminar, but the experiences of getting a broader perspective on one's own questions and of discovering similar problems and solutions to problems were predominant.

Cooperation and exchange between philosophy and psychology in the field of identity research already is well established in the field of moral education and moral development. It is not surprising therefore that many of the participants in the seminar came from these disciplines. They are aware that a fruitful exchange in this field between philosophers and psychologists requires from the psychologists the recognition that they need philosophy for developing an adequate conceptual framework for their empirical research, and from philosophers that their accounts of identity need to have some connection with empirical reality.¹ A further requirement for exchange and cooperation is that various (sub-)disciplines strive to tune the conceptual frameworks they use for discussing identity. They often use different terms for the same concept or the same terminology in diverse ways. Differences in terminology are related to differences in the primary interests of disciplines. The best way to determine the meaning of a particular concept in a context or discipline is to study how it is related to other concepts and to analyse what its precise position is within the conceptual whole. A good example of the confusion that occurs when a philosopher prefers his own idiosyncratic use of terminology is Charles Taylor when he argues that strong evaluations are a condition for having identity (in e.g. Taylor, 1985). His concept of identity refers to the normative ideal of a person who

¹ How beneficial such exchange can be, is shown in the work of Owen Flanagan (especially Flanagan, 1991). He looks into whether moral theories meet what he calls the 'principle of minimal psychological realism'.

has attained a certain depth in his self-reflections, and not the descriptive psychological concept of ‘unifiedness’. Thus, Taylor may deny that persons have identity who, from the point of view of psychology meet all the criteria for having identity. Such differences in the use of terminology obstruct a fruitful exchange between psychology and philosophy.

The contributions to this volume testify how fruitful the exchanges between diverse disciplines active in the field of identity-research can be and also illustrate how difficult it is to really integrate insights from other disciplines in one’s own theorising. Before giving an overview of the contributions to the book, I point at some areas of convergence between the disciplines.

(1) In her *The Constitution of Selves* (1996), Marya Schechtman has, quite convincingly, shown that philosophers dealing with ‘the problem of personal identity’ usually conflate two different questions: the re-identification question – the question of what makes a person at time t_2 the same person as a person at time t_1 , and the characterisation question – the question of which beliefs, desires, and other psychological features make people the persons they are. There is, she says, a strong pre-philosophical sense that facts about identity underlie facts about four ‘basic features of personal existence’: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern and compensation. Re-identification theorists seem to assume that their theories have to capture that link. Making sense of the connection between those features and personal identity is for them a criterion for the acceptability of the re-identification criteria they propose (Schechtman, 1996, pp. 1-3.) The logical forms of the two questions and of the answers they require are different: ‘The re-identification question seeks to define a relation between *two distinct person-time slices* that makes them slices of the same person. The characterisation question, on the other hand, seeks to define a relation that holds between a person and *particular actions, experiences, or characteristics* that are hers. The relata in the answer to each question are thus quite different, and so the form of the relation itself will be different’ (pp. 77-8). Thus, Schechtman suggests, the two questions of personal identity require different theories. However, the questions are not unrelated: “The

question of whether action A is attributable to person P is obviously intimately connected to the question whether P is the same person as the person who performed A" (p. 77). In Schechtman's view, also present in her chapter in this book, a person's identity is created by a self-conception that is narrative in form: "To say that a person's life is narrative in character, then, is at least in part to claim that no time slice (if you will) is fully intelligible – or even definable – outside the context of the life in which it occurs. To say that a person's *self-conception* is narrative is to say that she understands her own life in this way – interpreting the individual episodes in terms of their place in the unfolding story" (p. 97).

Narrativism seems to have become a paradigm that unites psychologists of the self, philosophers of mind reflecting upon the problem of personal identity, and idealist virtue ethicists who replace the substantive essentialist Aristotelian conception of the final end of human life by the formal notion of a life as a quest for the good. This convergence lays the ground for interesting exchanges, especially between narrative philosophical theories of personal identity and narrative psychological theories of the self. Narrative philosophical theories of identity still represent the identity of persons as an integrated, harmonious whole of diverse parts. An important current in narrative psychology casts doubts on this picture. Its adherents describe persons as consisting of diverse subpersonalities – a subpersonality being a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person.² It is evident that recognition of the phenomenon of subpersonalities raises the question whether a person is an integrated whole and, if so, how the integration is established. Dutch psychologists Hermans and Kempen contend that a final unification never takes place. They speak of an ongoing synthesising activity, which they call 'Self' (Hermans and Kempen, 1993, pp. 92ff.). Also in their theory a self-narrative has to make the distinct subpersonalities (or in their preferred terminology: I-positions) into a coherent whole. Here we notice an interesting parallel development in theory building between self-psychology and philosophy of identity. There is, of course, the danger that the term 'narrative' is only used to

² This is the definition of Rowan (Rowan, 1990, p. 8).

verbally close the gap between heterogeneous elements constituting 'the self'. Thus, it is imperative to reflect more closely upon the nature of self-narratives. What is the nature of the narrative that has to connect the different time-slices of a person? If Hermans and Kempen are right in saying that the self, as an activity that synthesises the diverse subpersonalities, is narratively structured, what then is the nature of that narrative? Self-psychologists as well as philosophers of identity looking for an answer to these questions, turn to the same authors, to Ricoeur for example. It would take us a step further when they come to realise that there are looking for the same thing since, evidently, you cannot speak of the (diachronic) unity of life apart from the (synchronic) unity of a person. This insight dawns in the contributions by Marya Schechtman, Ton van den Beld and Jan Bransen.

(2) Although some of the chapters explicitly address the issue of the relation between personal and moral identity, there seems to be no consensus about the nature of that relation: whether it is contingent or necessary. In their chapter, Ger Snik, Wouter van Haaften, and Johan de Jong distinguish between 'generic identity' – which in fact is a philosophical concept of personhood – and 'practical identity' – a psychological concept that refers to the defining characteristics of concrete individuals. They argue that the concept of personhood one has does not *determine* but clearly *delimits* the contents of the psychological concepts of practical identity based on them. This implies that views on the nature of the relation between – practical – personal and moral identity are influenced by the philosophical background view on personhood. The view on the relation between personhood and moral personhood varies with one's conception of personhood. For Kant formal practical rationality is a defining characteristic of personhood. Thus, the connection between moral and personal identity is a logical, necessary one. The same applies to communitarians who define personhood in terms of full participation in the moral practices and institutions, the *Sittlichkeit* of a particular community.

The idea that the relation between self and morality, personhood and moral selfhood is not contingent but conceptual is alien to psychological theories. Anne Colby and William Damon, important thinkers in the field of moral psychology, hold the opinion that "mo-

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