The Moral Person in a Narrative Frame: Psychic Unity and Moral Responsiveness

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Abstract. This article confronts two different evaluations of the narrative identity paradigm in order to examine the possibility of a minimal narrative, practical identity without an excessive stress on psychic unity and moral wholeness. It consists of three sections. The first part explains the criticisms of Lippitt and Quinn. Both authors warn of the MacIntyrean narrative model's emphasis on psychic unity and moral wholeness and argue for an ethical thinking that is built around concepts of psychic disunity and moral openness. The second section introduces thoughts of Korsgaard and Frankfurt as having one important intuition in common: both their insights express the idea that our identity conceptions are intimately connected with processes of practical and moral reasoning; the ways in which we see ourselves are significant for the ways in which we act. Their sort-like conclusions are linked to the insights of Kennett and Matthews, who argue with help of empirical research on Dissociative Identity Disorder and psychopathy that we should understand our practical identity conceptions narratively. The third and last section shows how the insights of the first and second sections can be brought together in a truthful vision of moral reasoning and the moral person. It argues for a more realistic perspective on morality without altogether banishing narrative thinking, centred on the concept of moral responsiveness. This results in the affirmation of a basal practical, narrative identity and the acceptance of qualities as improvisation and imagination in moral reasoning.

Keywords. Narrative, practical identity, moral reasoning, moral responsiveness, psychic unity

I. Introduction

The idea of narrative identity – the proposal to talk about the human self and personal identity in terms of a developing narrative – is often praised because of its intuitive approach. This article focuses on the image

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of morality and the moral person, as promoted by the narrative paradigm, and consists of three sections.[1] The first section analyses John Lippitt's recent criticism that problematizes the requirement of psychic unity and the ideal of moral wholeness inherent to the MacIntyrean narrative tradition. After a short reconstruction of MacIntyre's original arguments, Lippitt's objection will be carefully reconstructed in order to grasp the troublesome consequences of a narrative perspective on morality. The second section confronts Lippitt's remarks with reflections from Christine Korsgaard, Harry Frankfurt, Jeanette Kennett and Steve Matthews on the practical function of our personal identity conceptions. Their practical identity intuitions suggest that a narrative self-perspective is essential to practical and moral reasoning. The narrative perspective provides thus on the one hand a problematic depiction of the moral person when considering the critical remarks of Lippitt and other narrative sceptics but seems on the other hand inevitable for practical and moral reasoning if one examines the function of a narrative, practical identity in practical and moral reasoning. The third and last section investigates how these two clashing insights can be reconciled in a realistic perspective on the moral person and moral reasoning. It suggests a way of thinking narratively about persons and their actions that defends a minimal psychic narrative structure without excessively promoting the idea of moral wholeness. I will explain how the concept of moral responsiveness (conspicuously absent in current discussions of narrative identity) helps to make sense of (i) the practical value of narrative identity, as emphasised by Korsgaard and Frankfurt, as well as of (ii) the function of imagination and improvisation in moral reasoning, as stressed by Lippitt.

II. Psychic Unity and Moral Wholeness vs. Psychic Disunity and Moral Openness

John Lippitt (2007) questions whether a narrative paradigm can adequately depict a moral person. Analysing MacIntyre's view of narrative identity, he asks in particular whether unity and harmony are in the end truly

desirable for a human life. His answer is negative: these ideals promoted by narrative theorists sketch an unrealistic and dangerous picture of what moral persons and actions are. He proposes another perspective on morality in which psychic disunity, openness, imagination and improvisation play an essential role by alluding to insights of Philip L. Quinn, Martha Nussbaum and Cora Diamond.

In *After Virtue,* MacIntyre introduced a concept of the human self "whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end" (2007, 205). He depicts humans as 'story-telling animals' that not only tell stories to their relatives but also constitutes their own self through the medium of narrative and claims that this evolving structure is necessary to understand a concrete human life and its characteristic actions (2007, 216). His approach opposes analytic visions that decompose human actions atomistically in order to understand them. He does not believe in individuating different steps of actions to investigate human behaviour but instead stresses that the individual acts in a sequence of someone's actions are only understandable as a part of *that* sequence.

MacIntyre understands the narrative that holds one's actions together as one's personal identity, which diverges strongly from the reductionist method that tries to understand identity solely in the continuity of psychological states or events. "Thus personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires. Without such unity there would not be a subject of whom stories could be told" (2007, 218). According to MacIntyre, we are thus not only storytelling, but also *storyliving* creatures with a unified character, which has consequences for the ethical sphere and our striving for the good:

> […] in what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask 'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask 'What is the good for man?' is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common (2007, 218-219).

MacIntyre calls the unity of a human life the "unity of a narrative quest" (2007, 219). This quest is directed towards a certain *telos* that is not immediately substantially defined (e.g. *eudemonia)* but can be discovered during the quest itself. This conception of a quest and its *telos* is central to his account that links the fulfilment of our own story to a search for the good: "It is in looking for a conception of the good […] which will enable us to understand the place of integrity and constancy in life, that we initially define the kind of life which is a quest for the good" (2007, 219).

The foregoing passages reveal the ideas that Lippitt rejects. MacIntyre does not just present an ontological theory about personal identity, but fills his narrative framework with the virtues of unity and constancy. Our life-narratives provide us with a certain telos that gets specified along our search for it. We all start with a certain conception of what the good is and what has to be done in our lives. Further actions and experiences enrich this knowledge of who we are; which narrative we represent. While this process evolves, we can get a better grip on our own identity and try to act according to the essential features of it. It is exactly this central importance of narrative unity and moral wholeness to the moral person that Lippitt contests. MacIntyre suggests an image of human beings as agents whose actions are informed by the consciousness of the narrative logic of their specific lives. Lippitt believes that, in this model, one can describe a moral person as someone who always acts in line with his or her story-embedded ground projects and ideals that answer to important moral principles. Someone who never lies to his or her spouse, friend or colleague because he or she acknowledges honesty and loyalty as crucial parts of his or her own narrative is thus a moral person.

Lippitt assembles thoughts of philosophers who mark this image of moral reasoning as extremely poor or even dangerous. He believes that a moral life does not have to shine out in wholeness. He agrees, on this point, with Quinn who uses Norman Lillegard's characterisation of Oskar Schindler to illustrate such a view of moral persons. Lillegard mentions Schindler as someone who is at first sight a truly virtuous person but in

the end does not represent an ethical life at all. Although he saved the lives of more than a thousand Jews, according to Lillegard, Schindler was a mere *responder*, "[…] who simply reacted to a perceived need, rather than operating from some principle" (Lillegard, Davenport and Rudd 2001, 226). Lillegard concludes that "[w]e might have unbounded admiration for a person with the kind of passion that propelled Schindler into his heroic actions, and we might admire his cleverness and related capacities too, but still want to deny that his life is one of ethical virtue" (2001, 226). In his opinion, Schindler's life misses tight chronological and dimensional wholeness and cannot therefore be considered as moral.

Lippitt and Quinn both contest this moral disqualification of Schindler and state that we should still celebrate Schindler as a truly moral person thanks to his remarkable deeds. Instead of accusing him of not being a true moral hero acting from a consistent motivational self-concept, they emphasise that he did the right thing in the right place. Quinn qualifies Lillegard's interpretation as an implication of the emphasis on unity and wholeness in ethics. He, however, believes that relinquishing a certain amount of rational control over one's life is a price worth paying. By creating some space for disunity and discord, we have the possibility to "[…] pursue plural but potentially conflicting goods if they are great enough" (Quinn, Davenport and Rudd 2001, 330). Schindler is to him an accurate example of a moral person *because* he did not act from a strict life-navigating ideal. The inhuman things done to thousands of Jews struck him and caused him to sacrifice his guaranteed safety for these mistreated people. Quinn describes the moral subject as someone who is familiar with the plurality of human values and the surrounding world that asks for specific actions. He confronts the example of Schindler with Simeon Stylites, a hermit who sat on a pillar for forty years (2001, 331-332). His life was certainly marked by a high amount of unity but, Quinn argues, he misses something essential to be a moral person. Instead of living between others, where moral considerations are unavoidable, he escaped this situation by living a solitary life outside society. Schindler's

life may have taken some unpredicted curves but seems to feature typical ethical movements that the hermit's life lacks: adequate responses to the unforeseen moral calls of the environment.

Lippitt marks the overestimation of unity and moral wholeness as potentially dangerous. It could, in his words, possibly lead to 'existential myopia' or 'moral blindness' (2007, 52; 55). Someone who makes (moral) choices solely based on his outlined life plan and the yearning for unity restricts thereby the richness of new experiences. Lippitt calls this kind of attitude a prospective danger: "[…] faced with a potentially life-changing decision, we might opt for the line of minimising risk and thus, in Cora Diamond's phrase, miss the adventure in life" (2007, 55). He refers to Diamond's essay "Missing the Adventure", a positive reply to Nussbaum's article on the analogy between literature and morality (Diamond 1991; Nussbaum 1985). Lippitt discovers some elements in these texts that help to specify Quinn's criticism. The focus on qualities such as *imagination, improvisation* and *adventurousness* makes it possible to embrace a dynamic vision of morality that acknowledges the radical fluctuation of human life.

Nussbaum highlights the role of imagination in moral reasoning. She provides the example of a father-daughter relationship in *The Golden Bowl*.[2] After years of affectionate upbringing, the daughter has to choose between leaving her father for her fiancé or staying with him as a sign of genuine filial love. Nussbaum explains how the father makes the right moral decision by "read[ing] his way so into her best possibility" (1985, 518). Only after transforming the thought of his adult daughter separated from him into her swimming freely in the sea – thus by performing an imaginative exercise – does he realise that he has to support the daughter's migration.

Diamond agrees with Nussbaum that this ability of imaginative representation is essential to morality. According to her, the dialogue of Crito and Socrates that took place when the latter was waiting for his execution exemplifies this (1991, 310-311). Crito hypothetically describes life after

Socrates' death and its consequences for his friends and children in order to persuade him to escape. Socrates explains, however, that he would break an agreement with the state if he were to escape his cell. He thereby represents the laws of Athens as persons that guaranteed his own upbringing and safety and sees fleeing the city that is governed by these laws as betraying these very laws that made his life in Athens possible. This imaginative exercise makes Crito eventually understand that an outbreak would be morally unjust, that it would be comparable to using force to one's own parents (Plato 1931, 153). The two friends thus understand their specific moral situation by imaginatively transforming the facts to new forms and meanings. Diamond labels this as an example of 'moral creativity' and 'artistry' (1991, 311).

This accent on creative skills jars with the idea of moral reasoning as applying abstract moral principles to concrete facts. Nussbaum and Diamond highlight instead the faculty of improvisation against the focus on abstract reflection in moral philosophy. According to them, taking moral decisions is not so easy as checking a list with different possibilities that are linked to certain guiding ideas or principles. In a revised version of her original essay, Nussbaum marks this last idea even as a sign of moral immaturity and mentions how James illustrates the development of the daughter's moral character as a transition from a mind dominated by pressing questions towards the attitude of an improvising musician or actress. When the girl grows older, she understands that "[…] her script is not written in advance and that she must 'quite heroically' improvise her role" (Nussbaum 1992, 138). She learns that these pressing questions cannot be solved with help of general formulae and rules but should be faced with an improvisational attitude instead.

Diamond clarifies how a moral person, just as the improvising actress, has to be "actively responsible and responsive" towards the outer world by transforming certain themes, ideas and conditions to something entirely unexpected (1991, 312). This is not a risk-free path: the secureness of an ethical life adhering to strict principles is here exchanged for

the adventure of improvisation and imagination. She compares the mountain climber's adventure to the adventure of (moral) life itself:

> The sense of adventure expressed there, is closely linked to the sense of life, to a sense of life as lived in a world of wonderful possibilities, but possibilities to be found only by creative response. The possibilities are not lying about on the surface of things. Seeing the possibilities in things is a matter of a kind of transforming perceptions of them. The possibilities yield themselves only as it were under pressure (1991, 313).

Lippitt is convinced by Nussbaum's and Diamond's stress on imagination and improvisation. Instead of the yearning for unity and moral wholeness promoted by the narrative paradigm, moral life could be seen as an adventure. Lippitt highlights "[…] openness to risk and readiness to venture into uncharted waters" as essential aspects of ethical deliberation and accuses the MacIntyrean narrative tradition of exaggerating the degree to which we can anticipate and plan our futures, which leads to wrong qualifications of moral actions and persons (2007, 58). Schindler's choices did not result from an reflection on the structure and content of his life-narrative but from an act of improvisation responding to dehumanisation that surrounded him. According to Lippitt, this process not only applies to 'spectacular' cases such as that of Schindler, but to our everyday moral behaviour as well. This seems a valid suggestion: don't we perform the most admirable acts when we are no longer focussed on our personal stories, or on our decided ground projects but are suddenly confronted with a situation that calls for help?

While narrative theorists often pretend to provide a more valuable alternative to reductionist approaches to identity with a more holistic picture that links the human self with the ethical sphere, this seems to result in a counter-intuitive picture of how morality works. Lippitt saddles them with a serious question that has to be answered if they want to represent a truthful vision of morality: "Might not more openness, and less wholeheartedness often serve us better?" (2007, 58).[3] Hence, his

offered challenge for narrative theory is to explain how the element of openness can be built into their narrative thinking that promotes narrative unity and moral wholeness.

III. The Moral Person and Practical, Narrative Identity

I think that Lippitt and Quinn's critical remarks must be taken seriously The moral agent should be able to cultivate an openness that enables him to react properly to the specific demands of the environment. Following both theorists' insights, moral theory has to leave room for a person's sense of adventure and the possibility to improvise with the help of the imagination.

Still, I think it is equally beneficial to consider another line of thought that approaches the moral subject differently. Different philosophers have studied the practical importance of personal identity. Their main point is that the identity conceptions that represent one's own self are indispensable practical tools in daily life that fulfil a supportive function in practical and moral reasoning. This section addresses the interrelatedness of identity and practical and moral reasoning with the help of Christine Korsgaard's and Harry Frankfurt's contributions to the analytical debate on practical reasons. An article by Jeanette Kennett and Steve Matthews adds illustrative empirical examples to their theoretical arguments.

Korsgaard introduced 'practical identity' in *The Sources of Normativity* as "[…] a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (1996, 101). This definition is part of a project that is concerned with the question of normativity: how is it possible that we force ourselves to do certain things, that we obey particular duties and obligations that often seem inescapable to us? Roughly put, her answer is that we do these things because they help to constitute ourselves as rational agents with a certain identity. In *Self-constitution*, she claims that "the function of an action is self-constitution" (Korsgaard 2009, xii). This idea of

self-constitution as the function of actions seems at first controversial but is in the end not too far-fetched. As rational agents, we have the existential task of making something of our lives. We are confronted with lots of opportunities and we are thus obliged to make choices that give our lives certain directions. The struggle accompanying human life is, according to Korsgaard, exactly about constituting a personal identity: "But it is not the struggle to be rational or to be good. It is instead, the ongoing struggle for integrity, the struggle for psychic unity, the struggle to be, in the face of psychic complexity, a single unified agent" (2009, 7). In contrast to Lippitt, she qualifies the craving for psychic unity as an essential aspect of human condition.

Korsgaard understands human action as the result of decisions of a rational agent gifted with a free will. As Korsgaard is influenced by Kant's idea of human freedom as the self-imposition of certain laws, she illustrates how individuals dictate self-chosen laws to themselves, which are expressive of our practical identities. When identifying with a certain conception of ourselves, we determine which kind of obligations have a hold on us and thus what kind of reasons we have for acting in one way rather than another. When seeing myself for instance as a friend of others, I oblige myself to be kind and respectful to them and to listen and to help if they are in trouble.

There are several reasons to doubt Korsgaard's rather rigid account of human and moral actions. Are we always measuring our actions with the help of categorical laws? Do we always act in function of self-constitution? While one may answer these questions hesitantly or negatively, it is difficult to fully deny her intuition concerning practical identity conceptions. Human beings seem indeed to possess certain conceptions of themselves that are often applied practically. The acts that result from these applications can strengthen (or weaken) our identity conceptions. That a mother takes care of her child after a painful fall has to do with the fact that she is its mother. This act will strengthen her self-conception as a mother since she experiences her acts as typical of such a self-concept. After doing

something that is not in line with the caring qualities of a mother (e.g. over-aggressively shouting or punishing), she will probably reflect on her identity conception ('Did I do the right things?' 'Shouldn't I be more patient?', 'Am I a good mother?' etc.).

The same intuitions can be traced back in Frankfurt's notion of *cares*. He defines caring about something as being 'invested' in it (1982, 260). When someone or something you care about (e.g. your partner, your football-team, your country, etc.) is affected, you will be affected in similar ways. If your partner does fine, you will also feel good; when he or she gets harmed, you will be negatively affected. When we care about something or someone, a kind of personal identification thus takes place.[4] While Korsgaard would say that being a mother of a child is a part of our practical identity, Frankfurt expresses something similar with *cares*. That a mother cares about the child means that she identifies herself with his or her (mis)fortunes. A major difference between these authors is, however, that Frankfurt explains the things we care about as being out of our volitional control while Korsgaard sees the composition of our practical identities as conscious personal choices. Frankfurt characterises these cares as "volitional necessities": they bind a person's will (1982, 264). Cares sketch the borders of our will between which we can make free choices. That I care about my personal health, the futures of my children or my trusting wife means that I normally do not intend to smoke and eat fast food all day, that I will not spend all my savings on ridiculous things or that I will not decide important things behind my wife's back.

Although there are important differences between Korsgaard and Frankfurt, their accounts have something in common that is crucial for my purposes. They both emphasise that, in practical reasoning, we do use and need some conceptions of ourselves to fall back upon. Korsgaard explained practical identity as a description under which we value ourselves that creates certain laws and rules that will guide us in setting up practical reasons. While Frankfurt started from a totally different conceptual frame, built on cares, he made also clear that these elements

demarcate a basic direction of our actions. The things we care about "denote the contours of our identities", in Katrien Schaubroeck's words (2013, 153), and make us act in one way rather than another. Both philosophers thus explain the supportive working of self-conception in practical reasoning.

This theoretical conclusion can be empirically supported by studies of psychological cases that point at the interrelatedness of practical identity and practical reasoning. Kennett and Matthews provided an article that exactly discussed the connection between (narrative) identity and practical and moral reasoning against the background of research on psychopathy and Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Their article starts with two claims: (i) that in order to be a rational agent you have to choose your actions in accordance with a normative framework through time and (ii) that "moral competence cannot neatly be segregated from the normative competence required for extended agency" (Kennet, Matthews, Atkins and Mackenzie 2008, 212). First, they link Korsgaard's account of self-constitution to the narrative identity thesis. Both accounts describe an agent as someone who unifies himself by adopting normative reasons. They state that the narrative identity thesis can easily be applied to Korsgaard's vision of identity; the source of the normative reasons by which a normative agent unifies himself are then to be found "in considerations of what would constitute the best, or something approximating the best, continuation of a life story" (Kennett and Matthews 2008, 213). They conclude that "[w]hat is normative for the narrative agent, then, is a consideration of the coherence that a possible future part of the narrative bears to the story so far told" (Kennett and Matthews 2008, 214). Hence, Kennett and Matthews start from the element that Lippitt consistently rejects: a focus on one's life-narrative and its coherence as a prerequisite to acting well.

They assume that, when their claim is right, a lack of narrative unity will coincide with a diminished degree of agency. This is indeed the case

with DID-patients, who possess different personality states. They cannot command the switching between the two personalities, of which one is often amnesiac of the other (Kennett and Matthews 2008, 217). Kennett and Matthews mention the example of Eve, a woman described as having two personality states: Eve *Black* and Eve *White*. Eve *White* is portrayed as 'almost saintly'. Yet, Eve is also 'inhabited' by so-called Eve *Black*, a provocative personality who enjoys 'joking and pranks' and likes to go out and get drunk. After such nights, Eve *White* wakes up wondering why she feels so miserable (Kennett and Matthews 2008, 218). Kennett and Matthews depict Eve as someone whose body is housing different narrators who all create different short stories to which different experiences and character traits are central. Eve thus lacks the minimal diachronic unity that a normal life story possesses and is not able to attribute her behaviour to a somewhat intelligible story. When she wakes up as Eve *White*, the headache and the perfume-smelling clothes make absolutely no sense to her. A DID-patient as Eve is therefore incapable of full-fledged agency. These observations are confirmed in DSM V, where it is stated that "[T]he disruption in identity involves marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency" (APA, 239). What Eve shows is indeed the necessity of a practical identity for performing intelligible actions. That she can act morally by purpose seems therefore impossible since moral reasons are a subset of normative reasons.

Kennett and Matthews probe this last presupposition with the case of the psychopath. One could consider the psychopath as someone who is successful in adopting reasons, flowing from a coherent narrative conception, "[…] but who nonetheless rejects or is wholly insusceptible to moral claims" (2008, 220). Psychopaths can then be people with successful careers or vocations without being moral. Kennett and Matthews uses Robert Hare's famous study on psychopathy to object to this depiction. According to the latter, psychopaths are not just unable to grasp a particular kind of normative reasons but also suffer from general

deficits in practical rationality which gives rise to their moral insensitivity. He describes their thoughts and ideas as "[…] organized into rather small mental packages and readily moved around" (Hare 1999, 136). They lack the psychological coherency that one needs to take important decisions, to apply the right means to the well-chosen ends and they are quite impulsive and unable to stick to long-term plans. An illuminating example is one of a patient who decided to buy a case of beer while walking to a party. When he realised that he had forgotten his wallet, he picked up a heavy piece of wood, robbed the nearest gas station, and injured the attendant. He just did not want to walk a few blocks back home to pick up his wallet (Hare 1999, 59). This person lacks the perspective that orders preferences and reasons necessary for rational agency. His actions are unintelligible and out of proportion: he does not understand the difference in normative strength between the ends of quickly getting a small amount of money and the end of not ending up in jail. It is not that he just does not grasp the immoral character of his violent acts; he misses a general narrative, a consistent ordering of different reasons to estimate the results of his considerations. Deep agential deficits thus give rise to the psychopath's moral disturbances.

Kennett and Matthews made clear that, in order to be a moral person, you need an understanding of what normative force is *and* the ability of applying this force to yourself. One could describe these normative forces in a Kantian way as certain laws that you impose on yourself. Narrative theory extrapolates these laws to the conception of a life-story. These stories that embody our practical identity provide a degree of fundamental, psychic consistency necessary to make (moral) agency possible. Without such a background story, a set of cares or practical identity, agency becomes very problematic and moral decisions hardly conceivable. The emphasis on the practical function of our identities, as exemplified in the works of Korsgaard, Frankfurt, Kennett and Matthews confronts narrative sceptics such as Lippitt with an important question that they

have to consider: how is moral action conceivable without a supportive background providing agential orientation?

IV. Moral Responsiveness

The first and second section both elaborated on interesting but clashing insights concerning the moral person. Lippitt and others have argued that narrative theories, with their focus on the story-structured life, put too much stress on narrative unity and moral wholeness. The ability of performing the right actions at the right time might be more decisive for morality than the adherence to a consistent life story. Lippitt sees Oskar Schindler as a moral person not because of his consistent life project but because of his worthwhile actions during World War II. Openness, the ability to detach oneself from a consistent life-structure to take the required steps, may be more important in taking moral decisions and performing moral actions. The writings of Korsgaard, Frankfurt, Kennett and Matthews showed nonetheless how important our practical identity conceptions are. We all possess an idea of ourselves that is not only helpful but also necessary in everyday life situations.

The ultimate question that results from these two opposite lines of thought is whether a viable synthesis of the ideas of moral openness and a supportive practical, narrative identity is in the end possible. I think that a realistic view of moral action can endorse both after verifying three things. Firstly, the confusion in Lippitt's (and Quinn's) article(s) between minimal narrative unity and moral wholeness has to be solved. Secondly, I will propose another a term that is better suited than Lippitt's terminology to explain daily moral behaviour. Thirdly, I will show how this concept of *moral responsiveness* connects Lippitt's highlighted capabilities of imagination and improvisation central to morality to the assembled insights on practical, narrative identity.

Lippitt's article often conflates two different elements in his criticism of moral theories that have to be carefully distinguished, namely (i) the

basic amount of psychic unity or narrative unity necessary for practical reasoning and (ii) the ideal of moral wholeness. The first is a characteristic feature of moral agents, the second is a moral ideal that can be remodelled or criticised. Lippitt's main goal is to object to the moral ideal that is often inherent to a narrative vision of identity and morality, but I believe that he thereby too easily wipes away the underlying but descriptive claim about the minimal amount of psychic unity.

Psychic unity is the minimal conception that we have about our own self, often defined as narrative unity (see, next to MacIntyre, e.g. Bruner 1986; Freeman 1993; Schechtman 1996/2007; Rudd 2007). It is the form of a story, the sketch of a certain personal history that forms a background for our daily practical lives. Without this basic storyline about ourselves we easily get disoriented. Just as a horizon functions as the backbone of our perceptible environment, narrative identity forms the compass that we use to approach different situations. This becomes clear when we look at daily agential operations: I do not make (important) decisions totally *ad hoc*; my decisions at least partly result from what I experienced in the past, from what I find important and from the things I want to continue or change in the future. The bundle of all these aspects seems best conceivable as a narrative. The power of the narrative form is namely that it can combine different elements, roles and perspectives in a developing history, which is necessary to make sense of our complexly shaped practical identities. So is the decision of buying a house with my wife influenced by different elements such as my valuing of the owning of property, the conception of my partner and myself as parts of a lasting relationship and the foresight of having children. Our narratives contain certain themes and motives that influence our daily decisions. Marya Schechtman gives the example of differences in economic environment when growing up to illustrate this (Schechtman in Gallagher 2011, 398). Someone raised in a rather poor family will probably think twice when approaching financial decisions such as buying a house. Decisions such as these are not only determined by capital, but also by one's history,

the things that one finds important and so forth. The cases of DID and psychopathy show how a basic amount of motives, themes and reasons assembled in a basic narrative unity is practically indispensable. In Eve's situation, she could not make clear to herself why she should ever buy a house. This act would make absolutely no sense to her since her self-conception is so disrupted by the changes between personality states. The psychopath who violently robs a gas station instead of taking a quick walk to his apartment does not see the difference in normative strength between these two acts, because he lacks a somewhat stable practical, narrative identity that, among other things, consists of a certain order of normative reasons across time. Everyday examples and psychological anomalies thus prove the importance of a minimal psychic unity for practical reasoning and I think that the narrative form is till now the most promising and adequate way to present this unity. It can present the human self in a dynamic, evolving way that combines motives, themes, reasons and character traits as we do in daily life. Defining psychic unity narratively diverges, on the one hand, from seeing psychic unity as an unchangeable list of character traits and thus can explain how a minimal unity can be the bearer of other changes. It does not mean, on the other hand, that every little detail in our lives is important for understanding them or that all these little moments are directed towards a certain goal. It qualifies, however, the format of a story as a truthful and appropriate medium to clarify the explanatory relations between our identity-conceptions and performed actions. The narrative viewpoint is a very promising way to look at questions of practical identity and moral reasoning because of its combination of existential and intuitive appeal and wide-ranging explanatory power.

We have to distinguish moral wholeness, which is not a prerequisite for rational agency but a moral ideal, from psychic unity. A morally whole person is someone who always acts according to the same moral principles; he has a particularly consistent life with none or few irregularities. Obviously, this is not an obtainable disposition in reality, but an ideal.

Just like the ideal of *total* equality or *everlasting* romantic love, the ideal of moral *wholeness* could function as a guideline for behaviour and education but does not represent real-life situations. I think the importance of this distinction between a descriptive element of human nature and a moral ideal is overlooked in the narrative-critical arguments of Lippitt and Quinn. When objecting ideals just as wholeness and consistency, the step of abandoning the concept of a basic narrative, psychic unity is too easily taken. They properly warn us against a picture of the moral subject as an agent who primarily strives for consistency across situations. I am convinced, however, that this image does not automatically arise from all narrative theories; that we can think of a narrative view of practical identity that does not couple the ideal of wholeness straightforwardly to the moral person. I think this is what Schechtman once meant with a 'middle-range' narrative theory on the spectrum of narrative accounts. These so-called middle-range theories reveal the practical importance of a person's identity without positing human life as a narrative quest for the good, oriented toward a unifying theme as Macintyre's account seem to do. Schechtman categorizes and criticizes his version as belonging to the far end of the spectrum where the idea of a life-narrative is seen "as an account of a life that approximates as much as possible a story created by a gifted author" (Schechtman in Hutto 2007, 160). [5] Lippitt seems to understand every narrative theorist this latter way and thereby neglects more nuanced authors as Schechtman.[6] She gave a practical turn to the debate on personal identity and examined how persons' basic identity conceptions are connected with capacities such as moral responsibility, self-interested concern and personal compensation (1996, 135). When she states that, "[…] to truly understand [the lives of persons] we need to look not only at individual social interactions and practical activities but at the stable background structures that make these possible" (2014, 113), she is mainly concerned with the minimal psychic unity of their lives instead of a single-mindedly unified self. However, Lippitt is right to say that narrative identity theorists spent too little time on the moral aspects

of their paradigm. While some authors offered us more clarity on the relatedness of practical reasoning and (narrative) identity, we miss clear statements on how exactly morality and moral thinking are involved in this picture. Yet, I think it is perfectly possible to pair the valuable work on minimal, psychic unity with Lippitt's meaningful insights: the central place of improvisation and imagination in morality. I believe this only works if we bypass the choice between moral wholeness and moral openness that Lippitt seems to force upon us, and stress the importance of *moral responsiveness* instead.

I regard *responsiveness* as better suited to explain moral experience than Lippitt's *openness* does. It is not surprising that he does not give real examples of what such an open attitude is; the ideal of moral openness is as unreachable for us as the ideal of moral wholeness. Can we truthfully imagine someone who is equally open to every situation, without taking personal values and experiences into account? The answer is negative. I do, however, understand Lippitt's urge to create a concept that highlights important qualities like imagination and improvisation, a concept that proves how morality is not a mere abstract exercise of applying general terms to specific conditions. I believe he alludes to a quality that is known as 'openness and curiousness to experience' in ordinary language when he talks about 'openness'. Someone who acts morally has to be attentive and intends to explore new horizons in addition to his own, narrative, one. A possible suggestion could be to use 'openness' as the term for this attitude instead of regarding it as a moral ideal. I think, however, that 'openness' in a mere descriptive psychological sense points at a situation where elementary, psychological borders of the self have become hazy, splintered or even absent. In DID, psychological openness manifests itself by an uncontrollable intermingling of different personalities. Other stunning examples can be found in psychological anomalies like schizophrenia. Elyn Saks describes her personal experience with schizophrenia as involving moments where there is no core "[…] that holds things together [and provides] the lens through which to see the

world, to make judgments and comprehend risk" (2007, 13). I think she refers to psychological openness when she explains schizophrenic periods as moments where "[…] no organizing principle takes successive moments of time and puts them together in a coherent way from which sense can be made" (2007, 13). Psychological openness is thus a serious threat to the integrity of the self.

I believe that the concept of responsiveness answers the problems that Lippitt's original terminology faces, since it lies between the ideal poles of moral wholeness and moral openness and it expresses the quality often referred to as 'openness to experience' without falling together with the problematic disposition of being psychologically too open. But what then does 'responsiveness' mean exactly? This term points to the capability of being attentive and reactive to the changing calls of the environment without losing the anchoring grip on one's own narrative identity. A person who is morally responsive is someone who is able to interrupt his own story in the sense that a new situation adds another line to it. However, this is only possible when he can use, count on and interact with his narrative identity.

Let's take the example of an accidental encounter between a rather prosperous citizen and a war refugee who needs and asks for shelter and protection. Suppose that the unsuspecting townsman was hitherto mostly concentrated on his own little successes and pleasures: making profit with his own company, buying a luxury house, taking vacations from time to time etc. We take him to be morally responsive in this specific situation when he reacts in a proper way to the refugee's urgent question. He could give the other some money, food or clothes, or inform him about the facilities and organisations he should consult to get a place to sleep and to stay. What has to be clear, however, is that he has the possibility to react *because* he disposes of a rather stable self-conception. Without having that practical identity as a horizon that accompanies us when taking important decisions such as this one, it is impossible to ask the 'what should I do?' question in a proper way. Nobody seems capable of taking

such important decisions without having a basic conception of himself, a narrative that contains one's earlier encounters, responses and relied-on values, that provides psychic unity. I find Lippitt's suggestion that morality is not about being single-mindedly concentrated on oneself very valuable and important. Sometimes you have to take a jump. But a jump needs to start from somewhere. What I am trying to clarify here is that a step aside from the narrative life story is feasible and sometimes necessary in moral situations but that it is just possible when there is something to step away from. The encounter with the war refugee can make a formerly mainly self-interested person realise that in the past, he focussed too much on his own well-being and superfluous luxury and that this opportunity is a perfect chance to work on a more solidary attitude. Maybe, the encounter with the needy persons provides him with the insight that there are other things to strive for than a royal bank account and a further step on the career ladder. The businessman makes use here of his practical identity conception without totally sticking to it. A narrative view of our practical self-conceptions does not have to result in the glorification of moral wholeness but can clarify how we interact with the psychological order that gives us a certain stability to start from.

Moral life *is* an adventure, as Diamond and Lippitt correctly suggest, but an adventure that differs significantly from the romantic notion proposed by Lippitt. He seems to understand adventure as radically opposed to every form of preparedness; moral life can then be metaphorized as an unprepared trek in the jungle or climb in the mountains where the adventurer can't count on anything he knows or trusts. A more truthful description of an adventure is that of a person (e.g. Diamond's example of the mountaineer) who is in a certain sense prepared to approach certain not fully known situations. The mountaineer has the necessary equipment and rations with him to survive the unknown settings, but next to this, the element that Lippitt unluckily called 'openness' is essential for an adventurous trip. An adventure is not a fully outlined path but a journey through unstable undergrounds or unknown heights, and so is moral life.

We can't entirely anticipate our futures and are sometimes forced to make unexpected decisions. Still, we carry narrative luggage with us to fall back upon. I thus agree that the metaphor of an adventure is well suited to illustrate morality and moral decision-making but insist here on conceiving the image in another way. Again, the element of 'responsiveness' seems more appropriate to explain the adventure-like situations morality brings forth than 'openness' is. The real adventurer is responsive since he is in the position to react to unforeseen circumstances such as changing weather, wild animals or slippery stones. Adventure finds itself between preparedness and recklessness, just as a moral, responsive, life finds itself between the ideals of wholeness and openness. With a basic amount of knowledge, material and food, the discoverer is never fully prepared for what will come and neither does the psychic unity graspable as a narrative, practical identity guarantee the general formula for solving moral problems. Nonetheless, these two sorts of 'minimal equipment' provide a grip on difficult terrain and ambiguous situations. This is exactly what Lippitt and Quinn overlook.

Our narrative identities are not static, untouchable descriptions of who we are. I do not tot follow Korsgaard in her rather rigid neo-Kantian vision of humanity; however, I think that her thoughts on practical reasoning teach us exactly this. We sometimes have to choose certain laws, themes or subjects that are important to us that provide us with reasons to act on.[7] This process does not take place in an egocentric vacuum but in the world, where others ask for our response. When you understand moral action as being responsive, which means letting your own story interact with unforeseen events, it is not a surprise that Korsgaard adopts the same metaphor as Lippitt and Diamond do: that of an adventure (2009, xi).

Lippitt's emphasis on imagination and improvisation as essential parts of moral decision-making is congruent with my description of the moral person as a responsive person. These abilities answer perfectly to the proposed idea of a minimal, narrative unity that forms the root of our

practical reason and to the adventure moral decisions often are. Imagination is an act of transformation: it allows me to remodel the things that I already happen to know or perceive. Socrates' imaginative powers make Crito realise that the man he knows as his dearest friend is also a citizen who has implicit duties to the state. Or take again the example of the businessman and the needy refugee: the first's moral action will result from an imaginative exercise where he transforms a meeting of no importance into an encounter with a suffering human being that deserves a better life. He does not have a certain script that tells him how to proceed, but has to improvise. But with improvisation comes the same as with adventure and imagination: one has to start from somewhere and this 'somewhere' is a practical narrative identity that provides us with a basic amount of psychic unity.

I think that we are now where Lippitt wants us to be: a position from which we can give a realistic rather than idealized account of moral agency He is totally right in insisting on the importance of a curious and creative attitude in morality. When confronted with difficult situations asking for a proper, moral answer, we shouldn't hold on to some predefined commitments and life-plans. A further concentration on Lippitt's own polarised and confusing terminology prompted me nonetheless to use a term that on the one hand follows his initial motivation of providing a more realistic insight on morality but on the other hand does not look away from the functionality of our narrative self-conceptions. 'Responsiveness' points out the interaction between the demands of the outer environment, our basic amount of psychic, narrative unity and the creative transformational processes of imagination and improvisation.

V. Conclusion

This article started with John Lippitt's criticism of the way in which MacIntyrean-inspired narrative theorists conceive moral persons and actions. Building on Quinn's critical essay and Nussbaum and Diamond's

shared emphasis on moral imagination and improvisation, he argued for a concept of morality where the accent on psychic unity and moral wholeness shifts to an appreciation of psychic disunity and moral openness. While I explained the adventure-like setting of moral situations in the first section, I dedicated the following part to the practical identity intuitions traced back to the writings of different thinkers. I counterbalanced Korsgaard's rather strict reflections on practical identity with Frankfurt's concept of care that expresses the same underlying thought: our identity conceptions fulfil a supportive function in practical reasoning. Kennett and Matthews understood these conceptions narratively and explained DID and psychopathy with the agential deficits central to these psychopathologies. Both types signalled a lack of psychic unity or the inability to understand and apply one's own narrative practical self-conception. In the last section, I argued that these findings do not necessarily lead back to an unrealistic overestimation of moral wholeness. The acceptance of Lippitt's most basic insights does not preclude the possibility of a minimal narrative thinking but led to a further analysis of his rather confusing dichotomy of moral wholeness and openness. This resulted in the concept of responsiveness that meets Lippitt's main goal of providing a realistic view of moral practice without denying the practical grip our narrative identities furnish. I therefore do not consider this text as a straightforward defence of a narrative view of identity and morality or as a serious attack on the critical voices that interrogate narrative theory on her validity. It is a reflection on the dynamics of moral reasoning and the characteristics of a moral agent; a topic that needs more careful attention in narrative theory. I aimed to deliver a more nuanced contribution to a discussion that seems to be a matter of black or white, if you follow radical authors as Lippitt or Lillegard. In that case, morality means either sticking to a certain set of principles inherent to one's narrative self-conception or radically laying aside the practical function of our psychic unity. This article objects to this idea and combines narrative, practical and psychic unity with responsiveness, imagination and improvisation in a view that rejects their presupposed irreconcilability.

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NOTES

1. This article does not concentrate on the ontological discussion of personal identity. By 'narrative identity', I understand the human self in the form of a story developing through time that explains the relations between a personal history, experiences, values and actions.

2. Nussbaum concentrates on the work of Henry James (*The Golden Bowl* and *The Art of the Novel*) where James illustrated this analogy between literary and moral imagination.

3. Lippitt uses 'wholeheartedness' interchangeably with 'wholeness'.

4. In this reading of Frankfurt, I am not only indebted to his primary texts, but also to Schaubroeck's interpretation (Schaubroeck 2013, 143-193).

5. Schechtman counts theories that conceive life-narratives as "nothing more than a sequential listening of the events in one's history" to the other far side of the spectrum.

6. Ironically, he mentions Schechtman only shortly to minimalize the problem of inner conflict in his arguments against coherency and unity.

7. Likewise, MacIntyre's pioneering chapter in *After Virtue* can teach us the importance of a basic intelligibility and narrative identity without the need to agree with the necessity of one, existential telos.