

The Responsible Self – Questions after Darwin

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Abstract:

Self-identity has long been conceptualised in view of individual and collective identity, including, among others, the sense of connectedness and belonging. Among others, neurosciences have tried to explain the evolutionary sources of self-identity, but have become aware of the limits of their knowledge.

In my lecture, I argue for an approach to the concept of the self that confronts a) the analyses of neurosciences and socio-biology which focus on general features such as rationality, egoism, empathy and/or altruism, and b) the social sciences which focus on the different roles an individual takes on in social settings. In contrast to these models, I will use the ethical term of responsibility to explore the non-contingent relation between the self and the other that requires the self to become a *moral* self.

Interpreted from the ethical point of view, it is worthwhile to consider recognition of and respect for ‘otherness’ as part of self-concept, thus emphasizing fragility and vulnerability, ambiguity, and interdependence over against the sovereignty, transparency and autonomy as necessary dimensions of a ‘successful’ self-identity. I will argue that my approach has the power to transcend some pitfalls of post-Darwinian self-concepts but may nevertheless be open for some common ground between the sciences and humanities.

Introduction

The concept of identity is one of the most complex concepts in philosophy. It not only explains the constitutive relation between two entities, either as being identical or different, in logic and semantics, and it not only tries to give order to an otherwise contingent reality of the world, as reflected upon in the tradition of metaphysics – it also addresses the question of personal identity, and/or the identity of the self.

1. The philosophical discourse: subjectivity, existentiality, and morality

Although I do not intend to analyze the philosophical concepts of the self either in the ontological, the empirical, the idealistic, or the phenomenological traditions, it is necessary to summarize the relation between these traditions and contemporary thinking in a few words.

From the 16th century to the end of the 19th century, the notion of the self was the safeguard against utter scepticism or even relativism in Western philosophy – either as image of God in theological reasoning, thus participating in eternal and divine knowledge, or as basis for the possibility to make claims that are ontologically true, or as the constitutive subject of consciousness defining the epistemological status of knowledge. Even though the paradigm shift from ontology to epistemology had long been prepared, it was not until the late 19th and

then the 20th century that the self was radically questioned from psychology, biology, sociology, and finally philosophy itself. In Western thinking, which is the referential context of this lecture, the status of the concept of identity is entangled with the status of religion: As Charles Taylor has shown convincingly, the loss of religion as the decisive source of the self has far-reaching effects – as much for the self as for religion. Here, let me just state the results with respect to the concepts of the self.

Three basic characteristics accompany the notion of the self and identity in 20th century philosophical thinking up to the present. These are not radically new in themselves but, taken together, they bring about a shift in the conceptualization of personal identity especially with view to the ethical reflection:

First, **subjectivity**: while substance philosophy claimed that an entity exists in and of itself – and can be examined as such, the turn to subjectivity is – among other things – a breach with the concept of a possible cognitive representation of these entities. In the first half of the 20th century, the concept of subjectivity is connected to the insight of phenomenology, namely the claim that any knowledge is dependent on the way it is seen by a self that ‘intends’ the world in all her operations. Kant’s program is transformed by Husserl and Heidegger, because it would not make exactly this last radical step to constructivism of any act of consciousness. The self of the phenomenological tradition, we may say, is at the same time radical subjectivity while maintaining the claim of an outside world, via the construction of *meaningfulness* of being through the operations of intentionality.

While this is complex already as epistemological concept, it is complicated further when applied to the self. Phenomenology claims that the self is partly the object of the world, just as other objects; it can be analyzed in similar intentional acts of appropriation and analysis as all the other objects of reasoning, which in the 20th century become dominantly the object of empirical science, with many new and exciting insights gained from neurosciences. However, different from all these other objects in space and time, the self is an embodied self that cannot relate to itself in the same way as to other objects of the world. Hence, a fundamental dualism of perspectives is revealed: on the one hand, we address ourselves as bodies, and on the other hand, we address our-own-body as selves, i.e. as we experience ourselves as embodied selves. These two perspectives or discourses cannot be translated into the traditional language of body and soul, or the material and immaterial, because in the second perspective, the corporeal dimension is maintained, however different to the “body-as-object” perspective.

Because of the constitutive embodiment, the gulf between *being* oneself and *seeing* oneself with the eyes of others cannot be bridged. Furthermore, because of this, the self cannot be reduced to the ‘self as body’, or even to the representations of physical, psychic or mental states expressed in brain activities. They do not touch upon the dimension of being oneself as an embodied self. It is a gap that separates empirical sciences of today, too, from the humanities (though not the social sciences).

The turn to subjectivity does not mean that we are all monads without windows. Even though it is true that I cannot experience your pain or your passion, there are bridges between the self and the other, and even more so, as far as the self is to become conscious of oneself, he or she is to make use of operations stemming from the sphere of the “other,” most importantly, stemming from a language he or she cannot fully invent but rather discovers.

If the self is to learn about her- or himself, it needs to do this through different kinds of mediations or operations, namely with the other and the world. By way of these symbolic mediations, the self is dialectically constituted as much as it

constructs her own identity. We will see that – if this process of symbolic mediation is taken serious – phenomenology must be transformed into a specific hermeneutic of the self.

The phenomenological turn changes the concept of religious identity, too. Subjectivity as presupposition of the turn to the phenomena renders a simple relation between man and the divine impossible. Far from the traditional search of evidence of God in the world that can be discovered by metaphysical reasoning based upon the human participation in the divine knowledge, and also going beyond the dialectic of the transcendental self and transcendence, God is in the world only through the self's creative imagination, as Richard Kearney puts it.

Most approaches in philosophy in the 20th century, however, are laid out more or less independent of this theological thinking, because the constitutive source or point of reference for the necessary mediation of the self is no longer God; furthermore, the epistemological paradigm has changed through the modern development of the sciences. Particularly evolution biology and, later, life sciences, genetics, and neurosciences push the understanding of embodiment – to be a body and not only to have a body – more and more to background, in favour of the reductionist construction of the concept of 'life' as biological matter.

Practical identity: While the theoretical reflections on personal identity is continued in many different twists and turns, the second notion of the concept of the self, connected to subjectivity but focussing much more on the concept of autonomy as self-determination, concerns the practical identity just as much as the theoretical concept of the self. While the Lockean tradition focuses on the identity of the self as a continuous self throughout time, and on a practical self that can be held accountable for her actions, 20th century's continental philosophy takes yet another turn, stemming more from the Hegelian tradition: Beginning with Hegel, inter-subjectivity and social interaction become a central feature of self-development. Together with Kierkegaard, it is Jean-Paul Sartre who fully develops a concept that can be identified as the *ethical existentiality* of the modern self. Based on both the social constitution as well as on radical subjectivity of the self, freedom is a chance as much as it is a curse for the self: the necessity to make choices, here and now, defines us in our freedom, but on the other hand, it is only through these choices that we can develop an 'authentic self' as being or becoming oneself: proof of our individual identity, an identity that is not fully transparent but that is nevertheless engaged in one's own experiential search for the good life, based on freedom.

The moral self: The third notion also concerns the practical concept of identity, but it turns to *morality* in the normative sense of accountability for one's actions in a much greater range than this is the case before. While it is certainly not remarkable that there is a tight relation between the concept of the self and morality, it is worthwhile to take a closer look how exactly morality becomes a defining characteristic of personal identity in the 20th century. For this, however, we need to take on board the identity discourse in psychology and sociology that in the last century developed together and in connection with the philosophy of the self on the one hand, and social philosophy on the other.

Similar to practical philosophy, psychology and sociology are focused on the practical self. But they are much more interested in the development of personal identity through interaction with others and, in fact, in all the different social spheres with which persons are involved. Again, it is not possible to elaborate on all the different approaches, from Sigmund Freud to Erik Eriksson or Jean Laplanche, from G.H. Mead or Anthony Giddens, and from Jean Piaget to Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, to name but a few. I would rather like to

summarize a few characteristics here, again, under the headline of two main concepts, namely the concept of belonging as recognition and narration as the necessary mediation form to give meaning to oneself.

2. Self-identity and the development of moral identity

In 2000, an experimental and experiential dialogue was published. It had been held by neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricœur.¹ In this protocol of a dense and difficult conversation, the clash, but also the attempt to overcome the divisions between empirical science and philosophy are revealed. While the neuroscientist claims that mental states, including the subjective experiences of one-self will be “naturalized” so that they are accessible by other persons, Ricœur insists on the constructive nature of the experiments. He claims instead that the fundamental dualism of perspectives cannot be overcome and synthesized in a third perspective that takes advantage of representations enabled by the neurosciences. Let us listen for a moment to their conversation, newly arranged (and abbreviated) by me, according to my interest here to make the point of their departure:

Changeux: “What I propose to attempt is a naturalization of intentions that takes into account both the internal physical states of our brain and its opening to the world with reciprocal exchanges of meanings, exchanges of representations oriented as much toward perception as to action. Today, I think that observational methods make it possible to obtain physical facts about subjective psychological states.”(67)

To this proposal that is very optimistic about the prospects of such a “third perspective” after dualism, Ricœur responds the following:

Ricœur: “I do not at all exclude the possibility of progress in scientific knowledge of the brain, but I wonder about our understanding of the relationship between such knowledge and actual experience. ...

My question really has to do with whether one can model subjective experience in the same way one can model experience in the experimental sense. Can the comprehension that I have of my place in the world, of myself, of my body and of other bodies be modelled with doing damage to it – epistemological damage that entails a loss of meaning?” (69)

Shortly before, Ricœur indicates his alternative view that paves the way, too, for my own investigation here:

“Ordinary experience does not exactly coincide with what scientists include under the term introspection. Language forces us to escape private subjectivity. It is an exchange that rests on several assumptions: first, the certainty that others think as I do, see and hear as I do, act and suffer as I do; next the certainty that these subjective experiences are at once unsubstitutable (that is, you cannot put yourself in my place) and communicable (“Please – try to understand me!”). One may speak intelligibly of having comparable impressions while watching a sunset, for example. There is indeed such a thing as mutual, even shared, comprehension. This sort of comprehension is, of course, open to doubt. Misunderstanding is not only possible, it is the daily bread of conversation, but it is precisely the function of conversation to correct misunderstanding as far as possible, and to seek *Einverständnis* of which Gadamer and the partisans of hermeneutics speak. There

¹ (Changeux 2000)

is a hermeneutics of daily life that gives introspection the dimension of interpersonal practice.” (68)

Let me explore a little what Ricœur means when he indicates the inter-subjective, interpersonal dimension of introspection, or rather knowledge of oneself as embodied self in a world he or she shares with others.

Personal identity is shaped in a complex process that psychologists and sociologists call personal development or socialisation. In view of this research, the self develops from and in a web of personal, family, and social relations that he or she does not choose. Furthermore, a child is completely dependent on being cared for by others, not only in physical terms but also psychologically (Laplanche). By way of these relations, persons are defined by categories to which they belong, and at the same time they develop a sense of belonging that is an important starting-point for the choices they make: the objective side and the subjective side may not coincide; in the development of personal identity, however, they are interrelated dialectically, and together they define identity as the social identity of a person. For this, the neurosciences can help us find the traces, the “imprints” of this painful integration process, both in the study of brain activities and of the specific individual memory-structure of a person.

Identity is developed by way of and in conflict with the identities others ascribe to us. This begins with the simple fact that persons make use of language that they discover rather than creating it. In self-reflection, for example, we use the name that other people have given us. A name is not chosen, but rather appropriated and at the most given meaningfulness in the development of identity. It is often the case that with the help of a person’s name continuity between generations is created which is in turn intended as a source of identity. In the tradition of G. H. Mead, however, the dialogical constitution of identity implies even more. Mead created the concepts “I” and “me” in order to express two different dimensions of personal identity. The “I” perspective indicates the individual self-perspective which in the phenomenological tradition is further distinguished into embodiment and reflective dimensions. The “me” perspective on the other hand is the perspective from outside, the way I experience myself in the view of others. What we are and who we are is often the result of an overwhelming force of external ascriptions and only to a small extent the success of our individual search for identity. Beyond this, identity is a dynamic concept, so that it is possible to speak of learning experiences and self-corrections.

Hence, although it seems to contradict the turn to subjectivity within the theoretical identity discourse, the social self is much more the object of socialisation than being the subject of it. Identity is ascribed to us by multiple categories: sex, class, race, or religions are but a few of these categories. Whereas some of these categories or rather, spheres of belonging, are not chosen, others are. The dialectic between the subjective appropriation and integration and the objective ascription, however, cannot be escaped. The development of self-identity has been described in different terms. Psychological and sociological theories have emphasized that the work of identity (Keupp) entails not only role-taking but also the handling of different roles in the different spheres. Integration of these social activities does not end after the stage of adolescence, as former theories assumed; rather, the ‘patchwork identity’ needs to constantly and flexibly successfully integrate different performances of the self. What seems to be quite clear loses its ‘natural’ basis if we look a bit closer. Let me give some examples:

- Sex: A child is born into a particular family: whether it is a girl or a boy is determined by biological, genetic, and social standards as the history of intersexed persons may well tell us. Even though it seems to be the case

that one's sex belongs to the non-chosen characteristics, this is only the case as long as an individual can be classified according to the standard rules of masculinity and femininity. The social – normative - rules that are as much rules or standards of normalisation, as Foucault says, appear only in the reflective view of the self or society: this is all the more the case when these standard cannot be met, or when they do not mirror one's own experiences. Jeffrey Iogenides has told a heartbreaking story of the search for identity in his novel "Middlesex," interestingly linking the story of coming to a country as stranger with the search for an individual identity beyond the standard normalisation processes. Even though in this novel "Middlesex" is but the name of a city, it becomes the metaphor for the struggle of identity. Gender studies of the last decades have made clear that although there is a biological basis of one's sex, this is surrounded by culturally-dependent norms that define how this biological basis is to be interpreted (Faust Sterling).

- Kinship: While kinship seemed to be a non-chosen, biological fact, cultural history and ethnology have revealed the arbitrariness of kinship, too. With the development of assisted reproductive technologies, this goes far beyond the traditional boundaries: it is not clear anymore whether we speak of the genetic, biological, or social parent of a child; hence, a child might ask where the sources of her belonging really are and, at times, even *choose* among these different parents (O'Neill).
- Ethnicity: In his bestselling novel 'The Human Stain', Philipp Roth tells the story about a 'white' person who in fact is 'black' according to his heredity. While he attempts rather successfully to hide this 'stain' in the social world, he still is unable to forget his past, and the betrayal of his origin. Racism discourse has shown convincingly the social construction and normative force of these categories.
- Nationality: The arbitrariness of classification is also obvious in the case of national identity where some states choose the *ius sanguinis*, and others the *ius soli* as classification of membership, which is yet another category of belonging.
- Religion: Last not least, religion is a category that seems to belong to the voluntarily chosen affiliations, and yet, most people grow into a religion just as they grow into a particular clan, culture, or class. One result of the development of a self-identity is the reflective attitude towards most of the categories, even though some are more easily changed or denied than others. At present, for example, we observe the struggle for a redefinition of religious identity in many countries, cultures, but also in different religions, or different currents within given religions. This struggle concerns in part the question of religious freedom, for example in the case when conversions are not granted legally and/or socially.

Given that a person needs to integrate the multiple and plural identity categories, together with their intersections, it should be marked that it makes a difference whether we speak of the identity of a self being, for example, described as a religious person, or religious identity. As Amartya Sen puts it, it is a mistake to see human beings in terms of only one affiliation:

"... to take that [classification] to be the overarching basis of social, political, and cultural analysis in general would amount to overlooking all the other associations and loyalties any individual may have, and which could be significant in the person's behavior, identity, and self-understanding. The crucial need to take note of the plural identities of

people and their choice of priorities survives the replacement of civilizational classifications with a directly religious categorization.” (Sen 60f)².

Addressing the “Muslim identity,” rather than taking the identity of person who happens to be “a Muslim,” Sen holds, would ignore this plurality of affiliations and belongings:

“To focus just on the simple religious classification is to miss the numerous – and varying – concerns that people who happen to be Muslim by religion tend to have.” (ibid.)

Arguing for a liberal concept of identity, Sen urges not only to respect the plurality of one’s identity but also to consider the choices each one must make, either to commit to or to remain a member of a certain religious affiliation. Moreover, and just as important, it is not determined by others but the self’s own decision how to act within the range and plurality of a given religion, for example, to which of the currents within one’s religion one wants to belong, and when she needs to dissent from policies taken.

Finally, successful self-identity is dependent on the recognition by others that defines the status of belonging. By way of this necessary recognition – which mediates, maintains and transforms social norms, the self develops his or her autonomous self, i.e. a self that is able to make deliberate choices about her own life and identity.

Today, identity concepts are certainly based upon this dialectic of social constitution, self-identity and the struggle for recognition. Certain “imprints” (to use the language of analogy to the sciences) will be traceable in brain imaging and other technologies. Interestingly enough, it may be possible to find a “third way” beyond naturalisation and dualism, when we consider this dialectic as one that today must include the insights of neurosciences.

I will now turn to the second characteristic of the self-discourse in the humanities, namely narrativity.

With the expression “entangled in stories,” Wilhelm Schapp summarises in his book that carries the same name what he views not only as the a priori structure of every act of perception and understanding, but also as the prerequisite for feelings and acts of the will.³ By means of this theory, Schapp radically refers the consideration of personal identity - and not only this, but also the consideration of the human relationship to oneself and to the world in general - to the narrative structure on which the identity is based. Schapp's theory therefore makes a very wide-reaching epistemological claim: neither a theory of knowledge, nor of behaviour can be properly constructed independently from the human being's entanglement in stories. Understanding oneself for Schapp means understanding one's story and one's "self-entanglement" in it; to understand other people requires understanding them in their own stories of self-entanglement, understanding these as "other's stories," which is only possible by entering into a relationship with the other's story, with the other person, and beginning a new story.

² (Sen 2006)

³ (Schapp 2004)

Hence, any new story is not only bound up with other stories but also with the story teller, to whom it indirectly points, and with the listener, who grasps its content in a process of active understanding. The listener or reader refers to the story being told and in understanding continues it by comparing it with other stories and constructing a context between story teller, story and herself. Entanglement in other stories is always related to self-entanglement, just as Kant's transcendental apperception, his claim that a *Vorstellung* or presentation is accompanied by the presentation of "I think."⁴ The self's reflection about oneself, however, that is Schapp's claim, must be conceived not just as a presentation but a narration:

In conclusion, although physical self-experience is immediate and individuality stands for uniqueness and incalculability, the identity of a self is constituted by encounters with the other and the world, and these encounters can only be comprehended as experiences when they are articulated and interpreted – hence the turn to narration. The choices someone makes are not to be seen as 'just' based upon natural instincts *or just* individual autonomy but rather as result of a process of self-reflection that is tightly connected to narration; the identity of a person grows out of the story she tells, revises and varies under the impression of new experiences – a process I am tempted to call *narrative selection*.

The stories of oneself are embedded in the knowledge systems, social relations and normative orders of, among others, particular cultures, legal traditions or religions, from which we all take up words, symbols, rituals, and actions, in order to give our identities new constructive shapes. Together, they create spheres of belonging, or even collective identities that cannot be analyzed without examining the 'other side' of identity, and certainly identity politics of groups, namely that the formation process of identity presupposes not only the distancing from 'others' but also at times their exclusions.

3. Moral identity

The last two decades have made this turn to the narrative self in an unforeseen way. While the liberal tradition sees the telos of successful identity in the reciprocal recognition of free agents who have developed a reflective identity that enables them to make choices based on their individual autonomy, communitarian philosophers, quite a few of them Christian and Jewish, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer, have emphasized the necessity of structures and spheres of *belonging* as spheres of recognition.⁵ Social movements such as the women's movement, the civil rights movement, or the movement of indigenous people have all stressed the importance of recognition. The self seeks and grants recognition in the different spheres Axel Honneth, among others, has addressed: above all the family, civil society, and the political-legal domain of the public. The self is certainly non-sovereign in many ways, as we have seen already.

⁴ "Das Ich denke, muss alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können; denn sonst würde etwas in mir vorgestellt werden, was gar nicht gedacht werden könnte., welche s ebensoviel heißt, als die Vorstellung würde entweder unmöglich, oder wenigstens für mich nicht sein." Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 131f.

⁵ With view to Hegel's concept of recognition, Axel Honneth combines the two traditions, stating the recognition is necessary in personal relationships („love“), in the legal sphere („rights“), and as societal recognition („solidarity“). Cf. his (Honneth 1992, 1996)

While more traditional theories of identity could speak of standard biographies, a narrative unity of biographical integration, or processes of adaptation to a given social sphere, newer theories rather speak of post-teleological, plural and open life-forms that cannot – and in fact should not – be fixed in particular patterns of narratives. This then is much more compatible with Darwin’s view of the non-teleological evolution theory that nevertheless can trace evolution, i.e. changes and transformations. One of these transformations concerns the dimensions of morality.

Searching for meaningfulness of one’s life may easily be seen to be a desperate desire, or even a burden. Metaphors such as ‘thread of life’ suggest that in deed we have one big story to tell about ourselves. What does it mean that this assumption has been questioned throughout the 20th century? What effect does this have on Schapp’s theory of entanglement and hermeneutic phenomenology? Most radically, Judith Butler has asked this question a few years ago in her Adorno lectures given in Frankfurt.⁶ I here only refer to her thoughts with respect to the question of the self that is accountable for her actions.

Firstly, Butler affirms the ‘struggle for recognition’ as part of the identity concept, although she sees this rather from the perspective of Foucault’s concept of the self. The normative force of the “social” is, in light of the process of self-constitution, based both on a struggle for recognition and on relationships based on social norms that are not even imposed on the self but that the self necessarily appropriates to become a self.

In the tradition of the self-discourse since the 18th century, the teleological perspective and the temporality of the self-relation, or narrative identity and ethical identity, coincide. Quite in line with the Lockean tradition, Butler uses the expression “to give an account of oneself” for this inherent relation between being responsible – in the meaning of accountability – for one’s actions on the one hand, and narration, on the other. But exactly at the root of the moral self, a concept that is dependent on the notion of an agent who is accountable for her actions, the self must concede that the account of herself is not the account of *her self*. This, however, is not due to the limits of memory as Locke held, but rather due to the social constitution of the self, the origins of which cannot be reconstructed by the self. The self, Butler claims, is sub-jected to norms that she has not chosen but that nevertheless constrain her actions. She is not transparent to herself. She tells her story in dialogue with another person, but depending on whom she tells it, when she tells it, and why she tells it, her “story” will turn out differently. All these stories together both tell and conceal *the self*’s story, which in fact is untellable:

“If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life, but this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or what is not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the ‘I’ must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story.”

We can now conclude this section stating that both characteristics of the self are of striking relevance for any moral theory: the dialectic of heteronomy and autonomy that is taken up in the term of recognition, and the self’s accountability for her actions, though limited by the constructive dimension of a narrative that reveals and conceals the “self” at the same time.

⁶ Cf. her Adorno lectures: (Butler 2003, 2005)

4. The responsible self

In his book “Oneself as Another,” published in 1990, Paul Ricœur has presented a concept of moral identity that takes up the theoretical questions of identity as well as the concept of practical and moral identity. Ricœur holds that the criterion for a successful practical identity can be derived from the self’s moral perspective, namely from his or her *aiming at a good life with and for others in just institutions*. Taking up the Aristotelian model of friendship, Ricœur develops the relationship between self and other as symmetrical and as at least partly an act of spontaneous *benevolence* for the other. However, there is also the backside of a spontaneous will, and this is violence, and it is exactly this potential enclosed in human action that renders the moral claim necessary: Only against the background of “evil,” Ricœur holds, defined as violence against oneself or the other, arises the necessity to transcend the teleological perspective of “searching the good life.” The self must come to acknowledge the deontological claim of morality, which Ricœur articulates in a Kantian reformulation of the categorical imperative:

“Act solely in accordance with the maxim by which you can wish at the same time that what *ought not to be*, namely evil, will indeed not exist.”⁷

Regarding newer attempts of evolution biology to find the basis of a “moral sense” in benevolence, it is exactly this normative claim that raises problems: While benevolence might be traced in animal behavior, the moral *imperative* to shun violence is a much more difficult normative concept, presupposing the self-reflective stance of the moral self.

This concept of ethical/moral identity, which emerges from the interrelation between care for the self and an interest in living together with others in just institutions, constrained by the recognition of mutual respect and the inhibition and/or prohibition to use (unjustified) violence, describes the moral claim appropriately. It defines morality as a twofold relation of the “good,” articulated in the ethical language of desires and goals, and the “right,” articulated in the normative language of prescription, namely the “ought” that demands of the (moral) self to respond to the claims of others.

Responsibility, in this approach, is more than accountability for one’s action: Care for oneself throughout time and care for the other throughout time enables us to see how memory as *remembrance* must be seen as taking responsibility for the past, how the particular *choices* in the present must be seen as situated freedom and responsibility in the present, and the *effects* of the actions of today must be seen as responsibility for the future.

Following the liberal tradition of reciprocity and mutual recognition, Ricœur grounds morality in the capacity of the self to act self-reflectively, and to care for herself and others, while respecting the others’ freedom to act in their own way.

In contrast to Ricœur’s interpretation, the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas attacks the liberal tradition of symmetry and reciprocity as decisive moment of morality, since this is too tightly connected to the “will to survive” and cooperation as condition for survival, as evolution theory has it. Levinas is more Kantian in restricting morality to the normative claim. In contrast to Kant, however, it is not the good will, oriented by the test of the possible universalisation of maxims, the found morality. Instead, the *occasion of* and *reason for* morality is a one-sided claim, brought into being by the “face” of the other. Accordingly, and in contrast to Ricœur, Levinas cannot see a “shared

⁷ (Ricœur 1992), 218.

perspective” of mutual recognition as the framework of which the normative claim emerges. He distances himself from an ethics that combines care for the self and care for the other and argues instead in favour of the absolute exteriority and alterity of the other. Levinas not only describes the phenomenological relation of self, other, and world by starting with the other, but also anchors his concept of responsibility in the encounter with the other.

In the sensory “event” – which in German may be called a “Widerfahrnis,” something that ‘befalls’ you rather than being initiated, the self encounters the other as a kind of “object of the world,” as a phenomenon, and yet, as an “embodied counterpart,” symbolised in the face, which in Hebrew entails the individuality as well as the exposure of a vulnerable being. It is precisely this vulnerable, mortal face that calls the self to respond:

Someone who expresses himself in his nudity – the face – is one to the point of appealing to me, of placing himself under my responsibility: Henceforth, I have to respond for him. . . . The other individuates me in the responsibility I have for him. (God, Death, and Time, 12)

While the sense of urgency Levinas connects to this responsibility has led many to resist his radical reconfiguration of the self-other-encounter, Levinas himself was convinced that this origin of responsibility must not be regarded as undue, or threatening, or even as a violent intervention into one’s freedom and autonomy by the other, but as the “individuation of the self” as moral self. We may debate whether these experiences shape the sense of empathy, or whether the biological disposition to empathy helps to open up for the other in the moral, normative, sense. But I would still argue for a dialectic interaction of biology and morality, insisting on the different languages of empirical explanations, subjective experience, and normative claims. The question that could connect evolution theory or biology and ethics could be stated in Changeux’s words:

“Can a ‘new ethics’ be devised according to which following Darwin, the propagation of moral norms throughout human societies proceeds through the learning of ‘social instincts’ of sympathy that have their origin in the evolution of species?” (Changeux 2000), 32

For Changeux, it is clear that the “brain of a person” maintains the histories of evolution: “the evolution of the species, the individual’s personal history, and finally the social and cultural history of the community to which the individual belongs... the norms invented by humanity in the course of its history naturally exploit sympathy and the inhibition of violence in the context of a permanent process of cultural evolution.” (232).

For Ricœur this argument is precisely what is meant by a historical narrative: The organisation of experiences *retrospectively*, according to the values and normative judgments one holds at the point of narrating.

If responsibility entails the concept of response as well as that of accountability, then the other in deed is the initiator of responsibility, while the agent is accountable for her actions (which could also be the omission to act). Even though the predisposition to this responsible response may be explained in evolution theory, it will not be the “brain” but the moral agent who needs to make choices. I cannot see how neurosciences would change this challenge – the challenge of freedom, unless they would transform the entire concept of humanity that entails the capacity to reflect and make choices.

Evolution theory does not need to go that far; it just needs to be aware of its own constraint of knowledge, namely that the theory of *natural* selection is based upon the hermeneutic principle of *narrative* selection.

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