Emotions, Memories, and Narratives

Campeggiani, Pia; Teroni, Fabrice

How to cite

CAMPEGGIANI, Pia, TERONI, Fabrice. Emotions, Memories, and Narratives. In: Self and Affect. S. Lang & M. Niemeck (Ed.). Cham : Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024. p. 31–53. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-73294-2_2

This publication URL: https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:183553
Publication DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-73294-2_2

2

Emotions, Memories, and Narratives

Pia Campeggiani and Fabrice Teroni

2.1 Introduction

The etymology of words such as 'passions', 'affections', and—of course—'emotions' suggests that they refer to something that happens to us and alters us in some way.[1] The passivity of emotions is also emphasized in the folk-psychological idea that they are external powers that take possession of our bodies (and sometimes, alarmingly, of our minds). Accordingly, emotions are often conceptualized as instinctive and uncontrolled

[1] 'Passion' comes from the Latin *patior* (the equivalent of the Greek *paschō*), which means to undergo an experience. 'Affection' comes from the Latin *afficĕre*, i.e. being affected by something. 'Emotion' too comes from Latin (via French): *exmovere*, that is moving out, carrying away.

P. Campeggiani
University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: pia.campeggiani2@unibo.it

F. Teroni (✉)
University of Genève, Geneva, Switzerland
e-mail: Fabrice.Teroni@unige.ch

S. Lang, M. Niemeck (eds.), *Self and Affect*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73294-2_2

reactions affecting the way we feel, think, and behave. This is clear, for example, from ordinary use of conceptual metaphors such as 'to be overcome by passion' or 'blinded by rage'.[2] In the history of Western philosophy, the idea of passivity has led many (e.g., Plato, the Stoics, Kant) to think of emotions as forces that have to be subject to the normative control of reason. Dualistic views have often been inclined to separate the subject and his mind (or soul) from the material domain of the body. These traditions generally take emotions to belong to the inchoate, morally disengaged realm of bodily sensations and arational or irrational desires, as opposed to what goes on on the other side with intelligent thought, understanding, and the capacity to give reasons.

But this is only part of the story. Another approach is to look at emotions as ways of experiencing ourselves, the world, and ourselves in the world. From this perspective, emotions are not passive reactions but *meaningful interactions with what matters to us*.[3] In other words, affectivity is understood in terms of specific ways of interacting with objects or events which make sense in the light of the values we attribute to them. Affectivity, understood as the capacity to be sensitive to something that matters, is a basic feature of life.[4] Living systems have a basic interest in staying alive and therefore need to adjust to changing environmental conditions in adaptive ways. In this sense, they display purposeful behaviour and a concern for their own existence that is inherently affective. Affectivity, broadly construed along these lines, grounds a key feature of living systems, that is, the fact that they strive to maintain the distinction between themselves and the environment. Such self-individuation qualifies as a primordial form of *identity* and depends on an ability for adaptive regulation, which presupposes a capacity for making sense of the environment in evaluative terms so as to adapt to conditions that are good or bad, improving or damaging, for the living system. This form of sense making in turn implies an individuated perspective:

[2] On conceptual metaphors, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

[3] Claiming that there is activity in emotions if of course not to deny that they also have passive aspects. On this issue, see Gordon (1986) and Thalberg (1978).

[4] See Damasio (2010) on 'biological value' and Colombetti (2014) on 'primordial affectivity'.

the value of external stimuli and environmental conditions depends on the perspective of the living system and its peculiar way of being alive.

Perhaps more importantly for the purposes of our discussion, this understanding of affectivity paves the way for an exploration of how emotions, as meaningful interactions with what matters to us, contribute to our sense of who we are. In fact, the same connexion between emotion, evaluative sense making, and self-individuation that we have emphasized also regulates life in the complex sociocultural niches that human beings inhabit. The experiences that are usually described as (types of) emotions are (types of) evaluative interactions with objects or events that strike us as salient. Engaging with these emotionally, we make sense of them by evaluating them in specific ways. Of course, emotions do not occur in an affective vacuum. Our affective dispositions (as well as the more transient background affective states we might be in) shape our emotional episodes by informing our sensitivity to and selective engagement with some (and not others) aspects of the environment. Evaluative sense making, therefore, is grounded in our natural and acquired dispositions to feel certain emotions about certain things.

In this chapter, we shall explore the intuition that affective dispositions are the building blocks of personality. We understand personality along the lines of Aristotle's notion of *ethos* (character) in his *Ethics*, that is, as the unified set of one's affective dispositions. In Aristotle's view, one's character determines how one attunes oneself with the world and responds to its solicitations.[5] In modern terms, we could say that one's character is one's affective perspective on the world. Even if Aristotle himself was not specifically concerned with one's sense of one's own personality,[6] his notion of character may actually turn out to be crucial in this regard. This is at least what recent data suggest, as we shall shortly show. At first sight, this goes against mainstream tendencies to approach the issue of personal identity by reference to other processes and capacities, such as memories (e.g., Locke 1689/1975; Parfit 1984) and narratives (e.g., Bruner 1990; Schechtman 2011; Goldie 2012). Our aim is to contribute to the

[5] On Aristotle's view regarding how affective states and dispositions underpin appraisals, see Campeggiani (2024).

[6] Gill (1996) explores the difference between the ancient Greek notion of character and the modern one of personality.

understanding of the relations between our sense of who we are, memory, and narrative competency by focusing on affective dispositions. We shall do so not as part of an attempt to deny the key roles played by memory and narratives, but rather to show that our sense of who we are, which crucially builds on affective states, has a deep impact on how we remember and narrate our lives.

The chapter is structured as follows. In Sect. 2.2, we examine the relation between character traits and values. We describe character traits as dispositions that direct attention and mark value by manifesting centrally in emotions. By virtue of the evaluative nature that they derive from emotions, character traits are a major source of meaning: they inform our perspectives on ourselves and the world and, since they typically underpin beliefs and desires, they play a central role in intentional explanations. We emphasize their relevance for one's sense of one's personal identity and proceed to illustrate the multiple ways they inform memory and narrative competency, which have traditionally been believed to be the main sources of our sense of ourselves. In Sect. 2.3, we first discuss memory as the preservation of acquired information and narrative competency as a capacity for contextualized understanding before focussing on their relation. Finally, in Sects. 2.4 and 2.5, respectively, we explore the relation between emotions and memories and that between emotions and narratives.

2.2 Character Traits

Philosophers have typically emphasized that memory plays a key role in the sense of who we are. More recently, others have suggested that this role is played by narrative competency. This may qualify as an overemphasis, as some recent data suggest that the sense of who we are is shaped to a larger degree by other psychological states: character and personality traits. The basic idea is intuitive, since we pre-theoretically recognize the importance of these traits for identity, for example, when we say things such as 'After having heard the terrible news, Silvia was not herself'—meaning thereby that she is, say, normally outspoken and funny, but at the moment sad and self-conscious. The implication of these expressions

is that who a person is, her identity, is for a significant part determined by a variety of character and personality traits that are expressed in how she feels and acts in specific circumstances. Before elaborating on what these traits are and how they relate to affect, let us briefly present recent data that confirm their importance for the sense of who we are.[7]

Strohminger and Nichols (2014) have designed a series of experiments that show how our sense of diachronic identity is sensitive to the preservation of character and personality traits. Strohminger and Nichols tapped into subjects' intuitions about personal identity after a variety of significant changes. They were interested in how intuitions about personal identity are modulated by the psychological consequences of such changes and asked subjects to rate the degree of identity between the person before and after the change.[8] In the first study, the changes consisted in cognitive impairments resulting from brain transplants. The impairments relevant to us are those that Strohminger and Nichols labelled 'amnesia' (lack of memory for crucial events in the subject's past life) and 'morality' (loss of character traits such as being honest, untrustworthy, loyal, coward). Subjects rated changes in morality as having the most dramatic impact on identity—in particular, they judged this impact to be more dramatic than that of amnesia, the pairwise comparison being significant ($p < .01$). In the second study, subjects were told that the changes resulted from the absorption of psychoactive 'magic bullet drugs' as opposed to brain transplants. The changes were categorized in a slightly different way. As far as we are concerned, the most significant alteration regards the addition of 'personality', that is, traits such as being shy, anxious, industrious, absent-minded, ambitious, outgoing, and so on. Subjects again rated the impact of these changes on identity, and they once more rated changes in morality as having the most dramatic impact

[7] What comes next closely follows Teroni (2023).

[8] The data in Strohminger and Nichols and the other studies we are aware of ask subjects to express their views about diachronic identity *after* the relevant change happened (e.g., imagine you meet a friend you had not seen for 40 years; he has changed in this or that way, how does that impact his identity?), and *not before* they happen (e.g., imagine you will meet the old friend; he will have changed in that way, etc.). This is important, as views about, e.g., one's own self-identity may change as a function of one's temporal perspective—one may be ready to contemplate more significant changes as compatible with diachronic identity in retrospect than in anticipation.

on identity. However, changes in personality traits were now rated close second, with lack of memory lagging significantly behind both.

Strohminger and Nichols's main conclusion that character and personality traits are crucial for our sense of diachronic identity appears to be robust.[9] While it is part of our pre-theoretical picture that these traits shape our sense of identity, what makes the empirical results interesting is the perhaps more surprising claim that these traits are its most important determinants—as opposed to memory connections, for instance. In a nutshell, we think that we are first and foremost what we care about.

To measure the impact of these results, we need to understand what character and personality traits are. Here is a sketch (see Deonna and Teroni 2009). First and foremost, these traits are organized around specific (dis)values or the (dis)values of certain types of situations. When we attribute such a trait to a person, we thereby claim that she *gives a specific weight to a value or type of situation in her reasoning and behaviour*. For instance, an honest person is characterized by the weight she gives to the value of truth. Considerations pertaining to truth tend to channel her thinking in specific directions, to trump other considerations and to lead her to reach specific practical and theoretical conclusions. Moreover, she consistently acts on what she perceives as the truth, and she tells the truth even in the face of disagreeable consequences for doing so—consequences that would lead many of us to opt for some avoidance strategy instead. More generally, character and personality traits lend themselves quite naturally to descriptions along these lines. As this brief characterization of honesty suggests, character and personality traits have both a *cognitive* and a *conative* side.

On the cognitive side, for a subject to assign a weight to a value, she must of course be able to detect situations that afford the recognition of that value. One would hardly describe someone as being honest if she was incapable of detecting the situations that call for truthfulness. In other

[9] See, e.g., Prinz and Nichols (2016) for data in the more general context of approaches to diachronic personal identity; Jirout Košová et al. (2021) for data suggesting that the importance of traits already structures children's thinking; and Gomez-Lavin and Prinz (2019) for data in relation to responsibility ascriptions. More generally, these results can be profitably discussed in the context of "essentialism" about psychological traits, on which see e.g., Haslam et al. (2004) and Gelman et al. (2007).

words, someone with a given trait is characterized by the way her attention is captured and sustained. There is also a conative side to character and personality traits, as detecting the relevant situations is not enough. A pathological liar may be as reliable as an honest person in detecting situations that call for truthfulness, only they will offer him as many opportunities to deceive. What should be added is a specific motivation. In contrast to the liar, the honest person is motivated to tell the truth, a motivation which regularly trumps other considerations. In a nutshell, she cares about truth. Character and personality traits are more generally modes of caring about a value or a type of situation.

Character and personality traits are persistent dispositions that make up our psychological profile for significant periods of our lives.[10] These dispositions of course often manifest in episodes—the honest person is, for instance, singularized by her tendency to undergo specific mental states in specific circumstances. What are the central manifestations of these traits? According to the Aristotelian tradition to which we subscribe, character traits are first and foremost dispositions towards the emotions. Intuitively, we think of the honest person as prone to distinctive emotions depending on the circumstances. She is glad to see that truth is honoured, disappointed or indignant upon realizing that someone is insincere, regretful upon realizing how tempted she is to prevaricate, shameful or guilty if she succumbs to the temptation, and so on. Given that character and personality traits centrally manifest in emotions, they qualify as affective dispositions.

What are emotions? Scholars haven't yet agreed on a common definition of what they are, at least not if we understand definitions in the classical sense of a list of necessary and sufficient properties that something must possess to belong to a given category. This does not matter for our purposes in this chapter, since we shall rely on a minimal and, we take it, not very controversial understanding of emotions. According to this understanding, emotions (and, more generally, affective states) are

[10] This presupposes that such traits exist, which goes against some forms of situationism (Doris 2002; Harman 2000). For a critical discussion, see Kamtekar (2004) and Sreenivasan (2002).

subjectively experienced and valenced states that mark value and guide attention.[11]

Let us now combine these ideas about character and personality traits with our previous claims regarding affectivity. We have seen that, even at the simplest biological level, being alive entails affectivity (i.e., the capacity to care about something), which is enacted in purposeful behaviour and makes self-individuation possible. At the much more complex level of human life, affective processes of evaluation amount to the attribution of meaning (i.e., making sense of ourselves and what happens to us) and, when traced back to the set of dispositional traits that they manifest and that together make up our character, they individuate our personal perspective. Since affective dispositions appear to be such a major source of meaning, it is not surprising that they play a dominant role in our folk conception of personal identity.

Moreover, affective dispositions are the sort of psychological states that take centre stage when we relate to others and to ourselves, since they are crucial categories for self- and other-understanding. This is manifest in the fact that they feature as central ingredients in intentional explanations, that is, in our daily attempts at making sense of our own and others' actions and reactions. Actions and reactions can no doubt be explained by what we may describe as their proximal mental causes ('S did this because he desired that, believed that, or had a given emotion'). However, we typically strive for more general explanations that provide more meaning, so to say, by subsuming these local explanations referring to proximal mental causes under more general regularities. We want to explain not only actions and reactions in terms of proximal mental causes, but also the very presence of these proximal causes. Being (typically) long-standing modes of caring, character and personality traits provide the sought-for layer of more general explanations. By emphasizing the importance of character traits for our sense of personal identity, we do not mean to ignore or downplay the role of other processes and capacities, such as memories and narratives. In fact, in what follows we shall see that these

[11] For our respective (and, as it turns out, divergent) approaches to the emotions, see Campeggiani (2023) and Deonna and Teroni (2012).

various aspects of our psychology interact with each other and become integrated in our sense of our identity.

2.3 Memory and Narrative Competency

Before we investigate the relations between affectivity, memory, and narrative competency, it is important to be explicit about how we understand them and the relations between them.

We understand memory as the preservation of information that we acquired.[12] The two types of memory that we shall concentrate upon are often described as sensory and propositional memory. As the name indicates, sensory memory preserves information in a sensory format. You remember something sensorily when it is for you 'as if' you were somehow re-experiencing the relevant objects and events: as if you were hearing the music at that concert, seeing your friends at this party, etc.[13] In contrast to sensory memory, propositional memory preserves information in a propositional format—it is the sort of memory that underscores most of our knowledge of historical, geographical, and mathematical facts, which is not characterized by a sense of re-experiencing these facts or one's learning of these facts. We also often propositionally and not sensorily remember facts about our own lives—in these cases, we colloquially say that we know that we witnessed an event, say, without being able to recall it. These two types of memory can target specific events, but also generic events (one remembers sensorily how it is to take the bus from a given stop) or facts at any level of generality (one remembers propositionally that Springs are beautiful seasons, etc.).

Clarifying what we mean by narrative competency requires a bit more stage-setting. In a nutshell, narrative competency is a capacity for contextualized understanding that typically entails setting events in a spatiotemporal framework and connecting them in meaningful ways. This is an

[12] There are good reasons to think that memory, and episodic memory in particular, has reconstructive aspects (Michaelian 2016). Depending on one's position regarding how much reconstruction is compatible with memory, the notion of preservation that we use here and in what follows will have to be specified in more or less stringent ways.

[13] For more on this, see Teroni (2017).

ability which in ordinary cases children start to use during the second year of life and that is shaped by the acquisition of language as well as by a developing conceptual sense of oneself (Howe 2000, 91–2). Prior to this, of course, one already has a sense of oneself, which has been variously referred to as, for example, 'the pre-conceptual self' (Bruner 2002), 'the minimal self' (Gallagher 2020), or 'the core self' (Damasio 2010) and has been described in terms of pre-reflective self-experience. In other words, long before we start recognizing ourselves in the mirror, learning languages, or sharing attention, we have a sense of what it means to be a subject of experience.[14] But it is with joint attention and secondary intersubjectivity that babies start placing themselves and others in *contexts*. While newborns perceive and interact with the caregiver dyadically, with the nine-month revolution babies begin understanding other people's intentions, motives, and goals and forming corresponding folk-psychological conceptions.[15] This becomes possible precisely because they acquire the capacity to *contextualize* what goes on.[16] Context opens a landscape of meanings and forms of understanding that are richer than those allowed by primary intersubjective relationships. And as the complexity of their social interactions increases, and as they learn language, children acquire narrative competency, the ability to use contextual information and provide accounts of what happens that entail setting events in a spatiotemporal framework, connecting them on a causal basis, and interpreting their meaning from the perspective of situated agents.

Crucially, this capacity is fostered and informed by children's participation in shared narratives (Hutto 2007; Gallagher and Hutto 2008). In fact, for the entire duration of our lives we are exposed to shared narratives. This is important, because social and cultural meaning puts significant constraints on the stories we can tell. In this respect, we should

[14] Meltzoff and Moore (1977) explain neonatal imitation of facial and manual gestures as the ability to equate observed behaviour with one's own unseen behaviour. See also Johnson et al. (1991) and Legerstee (1991) on human neonates responding differently to animate and inanimate faces and Gallagher and Meltzoff (1996), who discuss newborn imitation and what they call 'the proprioceptive self'.

[15] See Meltzoff (1995) on 18-months-old children understanding persons (but not inanimate objects) as having goals and intentions.

[16] For a narrative account based on actions requiring context to be intelligible, see MacIntyre (1981, 209 ff).

emphasize that by 'narrative' we do not mean 'fictional' or 'literary', and that when we acknowledge the role of narrative in one's sense of oneself we do not imply that selves are freely and creatively invented as fictional characters might be (MacIntyre 1981, 213–14). Besides, we do not define narrative (and certainly not self-narrative) in such a minimal way as, for example, Lamarque does when he writes that it 'just is the ordering of a sequence of events, including the placing of events in causal sequence' (Lamarque 2004, 406). Scientific explanations, for example, meet Lamarque's requirements but do not amount to narratives as we understand them. Rather, with MacIntyre (1981), we take narratives to presuppose intelligibility and accountability: narratives turn occurrences into actions, so to say. As MacIntyre puts it: 'to identify an occurrence as an action is in the paradigmatic instances to identify it under a type of description which enables us to see that occurrence as flowing intelligibly from a human agent's intentions, motives, passions and purposes' (MacIntyre 1981, 209).[17]

Narratives, therefore, are tools for making sense of events. They seem to be the way *par excellence* we make sense of what happens to us. They make it possible for us to experience our lives as ordered, coherent, and meaningful. How is it so? As emphasized by many in the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions (e.g., Ricoeur; Gallagher), one of the key features of narratives is that they involve a temporal structure, producing order by creating sequences of events that are related to each other in meaningful ways.[18] In self-narratives, temporal structure is what grounds our sense of continuity from our past to the present moment and current expectations about what the future will be like. Besides,

[17] Note that MacIntyre's phrase 'under a type of description' alludes, no doubt deliberately, to G.E.M. Anscombe's well-known analysis of action. The importance of this insight for narrative accounts of what it is to be an action is highlighted in Gallagher (2020).

[18] 'The internal temporality of narrative supports the plot structure. With regard to self-narratives, plot structure mirrors Dilthey's concept of the "connectedness of life" (Ricoeur 1992, 115). The connectedness across time is not a mere causal connectedness (although it can also be causal); it's a connectedness of meaning—a connectedness that makes sense of the events, as MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Rudd, and others agree. This idea of a sense-making connectedness is neither a causal connection nor a "real connexion" in Hume's sense (see Strawson 2013, 19, 103). This doesn't mean, however, that it is purely imaginative or fictional. Rather, it's interpretational or hermeneutical, as well as normative, and in most cases involves evaluative judgments and reasons for action' (Gallagher 2014, 405).

narratives are about subjects who can both be agents who do things intentionally and patients who experience the outcome of somebody else's doings. And, as Rudd remarks, 'you understand my actions when you can see *why* I did them; what I was doing them *for*' (2012, 178).[19] We have already mentioned how emotions and affective dispositions play a major role in grounding self- and other-understanding in agent-centred narrative frameworks, and we shall soon have more to say.

Let us now focus on the relation between memory and narrative competency. It is perhaps already clear from the foregoing that the latter capacity is cognitively more complex than merely having memories. More specifically, memory is a competence that manifests in mental states, that is, in episodes of sensory or propositional remembering. Narrative competency manifests in episodes that essentially involve thoughts about different types of mental states, a form of metarepresentation. Thus, memories as such (be they sensory or propositional) need not amount to narratives. Some sensory and propositional memories have contents that are too simple for this to be the case. Of course, both types of memories can be more richly structured and come with more contextual flesh, so to say, and in that case their content lends itself to be 'narrated'.[20] This is, for instance, the case when we remember a sequence of events that are meaningfully connected as opposed to what Goldie calls 'chronicles' (Goldie 2012, 7), that is mere lists of unrelated incidents (see also Schechtman 2007, 159–160). Moreover, for creatures like us, memories very often function as ingredients in narrative understanding, as when we incorporate one or more of them into an organized explanation of a period of our lives. Memories, then, need not but can be recalled within the interpretive framework entailing meaningful connections and personal perspectives that is provided by narrative competency.[21]

[19] Let us observe in passing that, like memories, narratives can refer to specific or generic events and to facts at different levels of generality (Fivush and Waters 2019).

[20] This means that, in the terminology we have adopted, some phenomena that are often described as types of memory—in particular autobiographical memory (see, e.g., Conway et al. 2019) and on some influential accounts, episodic memory (Tulving 1985)—are narratives since they presuppose a timeline on which the subject places the relevant events.

[21] For a similar line of thought, see Papineau (2016). Papineau claims that narratives are more than memories, since we can remember events and facts without being able to place them in a given spatiotemporal framework, without 'weaving' in causal sequences.

2.4 Emotions and Memories

Now that we have distinguished memories from narratives, we shall first explore the relations of emotions to memories and next those of emotions to narratives.

As regards the relations between emotions and memories, it is helpful to distinguish two times at which emotions impact on memory: the time of memory encoding and the time of remembering. Consider first the relation between the encoding of memories and emotions. This relation is best approached through the links that memories and emotions have with attention.

First, there are intimate relations between emotions and attention. Emotions are processes (Goldie 2000; Robinson 2018; Scherer 2001) which typically begin when we notice a significant event or object. Emotional capture of attention is often involuntary and constitutes the type of undemanding value detection that we discussed in relation to the cognitive side of character traits. Attention next focuses on the object and the emotion follows a course, which is the joint upshot of what happens in the environment and of the changes that the emotion orchestrates. In so doing, emotions help the subject deal with the relevant objects; this appears to be one of the central functions of emotions (Brosch et al. 2013; Finucane 2011; Harmon-Jones et al. 2013). Second, converging evidence supports the claim that the encoding of emotionally arousing material is enhanced. This is part of our pre-theoretical understanding of the impact of emotions on memory, since we regularly realize that what we remember tends to correspond with what elicited strong (positive or negative) emotions in us. Empirical studies confirm this idea and further show that enhanced encoding is specific to the emotionally salient object (as opposed to other aspects of the scene), which is then better remembered (Hamann 2001; LaBar and Cabeza 2006; Phelps 2004; Yonelinas and Ritchey 2015).

Combining these two ideas means that attention mediates interesting relations between emotions and memories. Emotions focus the subject's attention on significant events and objects. This enhances encoding and, subsequently, what we can remember.

The second relation between emotions and memory that we want to emphasize does not take place at the time of encoding but later, at the time of remembering. It concerns our capacity to access memories. At any moment, there are many things that are somehow stored in our memories. Memory is a competence and a substantial portion of what we remember in this dispositional sense can be retrieved only if some condition is met. Something we come across—the photograph of an old friend, a song or a madeleine, for instance—may jog our memories and lead us to recall events and facts that we did not expect to remember. More generally, our capacity to access memories is sensitive to a variety of factors, amongst which one affective factor is crucial in the present context. This is the so-called 'mood congruence effect'. This label refers to a well-documented phenomenon: when we are in a given emotional state, we are more likely to remember events of a similar emotional 'quality' compared to events of different emotional qualities or neutral events (Blaney 1986; Gaddy and Ingram 2014; Loeffler et al. 2013; Matt et al. 1992).

Mood congruence allows us to look into our sense of personal identity from a new perspective. As we have observed, philosophers interested in personal identity often highlight the role that memory plays within it. Now, it is fair to ask which, among our many memories, play such an identity constituting role: do all memories qualify equally, or only those memories that are accessed at some point in the subject's life? Moreover, do all accessed memories qualify in the same way, or is their contribution a function of the number of times they are accessed? One may think that, insofar as we are interested in the *sense* of personal identity, accessed memories should have a privileged role, and that how much privileged their role is is a function of how frequently they are accessed. In turn, this suggests that our sense of personal identity is profoundly influenced by the emotions that we experience.[22]

So, at the time of encoding as well as at the time of remembering, memory is influenced by the affective states we happen to be in. Emotions are central determinants of our capacity to remember and, hence, of the

[22] An intriguing issue that we cannot explore here concerns the impact of changes in the affective self on the quality of Mental Time Travel. For instance, Libby and Eibach (2002) gathered data suggesting that remembered or imagined events conflicting with what we (think we) are now tend to be viewed from an observer perspective, which seems to manifest a sort of distancing effect.

sense of personal identity that it constitutes—this sense of identity has been shaped by the emotions we have felt, and it continues to be shaped by the emotions that we feel when we remember. For that reason, accounts of the sense of our identity that focus on memory attribute, if only implicitly and indirectly, a key role to emotions and to the character and personality traits that these emotions manifest.

As we have seen, narratives are more than memories: not all memories have a content that is sufficiently rich to be narratively structured. When it is, the structure it takes at the time of encoding will be moulded by the emotional state one is in. The same is true at the time of remembering: the availability of narratively structured memories is also strongly influenced by one's affective states. Besides, memories provide the main ingredients of many (self-)narratives: as we saw, narratives are meaningful sequences of events or facts, and these often (though not necessarily) come from memory. This is to say that the two influences of emotions on memory that we just reviewed also shape the narratives we weave about ourselves. Privileged encoding of emotional material means that, barring other sources of knowledge about ourselves, our self-narratives tend to assemble around events that have had an emotional impact on us. This effect of emotions on narratives is doubled up, so to say, by the impact of mood congruence on what is available for us to build narratives. Given mood congruence, the dominant emotion at the time of remembering 'sets the stage' for a narration that takes a specific affective angle: events united by the same or a closely related affective tone are available as building blocks of narratives.[23] Needless to say, these effects of emotions on narratives are likely to increase with time, since narratives once told will tend to be remembered, and to foster further similarly tinged narrations down the line.

[23] This is nicely emphasized by Martin Conway, who observes that there are 'striking biases in memory availability by dominant motive type' (Conway 2000, 267).

2.5 Emotions and Narratives

Emotions are bound up with narratives in at least two ways. We have seen that emotions focus attention in the process of memory formation and facilitate access to mood-congruent memories at the time of remembering. Analogously, by directing attention, that is, by signalling the salience of certain situational features and silencing others, emotions inform our sensitivity and selective engagement with corresponding aspects of the environment. By doing so, they substantially contribute to the way we construe scenarios and make sense of what is going on. Besides, not only do emotions contribute to our selection of relevant stimuli and events, but they also underpin the way we appraise the latter. For this reason, the emotions that we are inclined to feel given our affective dispositions and personality traits, as well as those that are facilitated by the more contingent and transient background feelings we might be experiencing, colour our narrative perspective on both the interpretative and the normative levels. Depending on the emotions we are disposed to feel in a given situation, different features strike us as salient and we appraise them differently in terms of the values they bear.

Crucially, as Aristotle reminds us, we acquire affective dispositions through habituation and socialization. The subjective dimension of our emotional experience is therefore significantly informed by the intersubjective, sociocultural, and linguistic contexts we belong to. In this respect, emotions and narratives are related in yet another sense, which can be illustrated by appealing to folk psychology and the notion of emotion 'scripts'. It has been shown that the folk-psychological concept of emotion is better described as prototypically organized: it has an internal structure that includes best examples, worse ones, and borderline cases, and it has fuzzy boundaries.[24] Members of the 'emotion' category can be similar in a variety of ways, as illustrated by Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance (Wittgenstein 1953). 'Emotion' is thus a cluster concept that includes several characteristic features, none of which is necessary to

[24] Fehr and Russell (1984). For prototype theory see Rosch (1978) and Lakoff (1987). This is true also of folk-psychological concepts of individual emotions, such as 'anger', 'fear', 'happiness', and so on.

each and every instance of emotion. On this view, it has been suggested that we should think of emotions as 'syndromes'[25] or 'scripts' organized around a sequence of interrelated components that usually, but not necessarily, include eliciting conditions, appraisals, feelings, desires, physiological alterations, expressions, and actions (Fehr and Russell 1984; Russell 1991; Lakoff 1987; also see de Sousa 1987 on paradigm scenarios).

It is precisely these 'scripts' that ground our understanding of emotions, both other people's and our own. We perceive emotions as meaningful configurations whose structure lends itself to narrative representation. This means that, drawing on our linguistic, conceptual, and sociocultural resources, we look for patterns and recognize an emotional *Gestalt* by embedding subevents in specific contexts and ordering them in coherent sequences. So, on the one hand, we understand the sequence of subevents that make up an emotion in narrative terms—for instance, we perceive somebody's anger when we recognize a causal connection between, say, their aggressive behaviour and a specific feature of the occasion when this behaviour is manifested. On the other hand, emotions themselves are events that make sense in larger narratives—to qualify a specific event as the eliciting condition of anger, we need to interpret it as, say, a deliberate offense that is harmful and undeserved, and such an interpretation requires that we make sense of social, behavioural, and contextual information. Emotions do not occur in isolation: implicitly or explicitly, they are always situated responses that we understand by appealing, for example, to their causes, their consequences, or their goals, that is by embedding them in wider narrative scenarios (Cairns 2022).

To sum up, we recognize emotion patterns *via* resemblance to prototypes and scripts and by contextualizing them in larger narrative structures. Importantly, we also often understand these larger structures by reference to emotions as a way of explaining motives, causes, and consequences, as well as of making predictions and developing expectations. For this reason, the explanatory power of emotions also plays a major role in our outlook on who we are and on how we have become the persons

[25] Cf. Austin (1979, 109): 'It seems fair to say that "being angry" is in many respects like "having mumps". It is a description of a whole pattern of events, including occasion, symptoms, feeling and manifestation, and possibly other factors besides'.

we are. As we have seen, this understanding relies not only on proximal mental causes: we also strive to understand the very existence of these mental causes themselves as the manifestations of character and personality traits that constitute long-standing modes of caring. The emotions we have experienced, as well as those that we are inclined to experience on the grounds of our character and dispositions, provide us with information concerning our values and our evaluative understanding of what happens to us. Notably, our emotions also depend on the way we construe others' behaviour and react to their actions, as well as on the sociocultural resources we can draw on. In this sense, they are never only about our individual selves, but are also informed by the wider intersubjective network we belong to, in the same way as our personal narratives emerge interactively.

2.6 Conclusion

Philosophical and psychological approaches to the self, its constitution, and our sense of personal identity have traditionally focused either on memory or on narrative. In this chapter, we have explored a third way that lays emphasis on the role of character traits, understood as affective dispositions, in building personality and our sense of self. By discussing how affective dispositions inform the formation and the recollection of memories as well as our narrative understanding of what happens to us, we have argued that the emotions we are inclined to feel given our character and personality traits have a deep impact on how we remember and narrate our own lives.

References

Austin, John L. 1979. Other Minds. In *Philosophical Papers*, ed. James O. Urmson and Geoffrey J. Warnock, 76–116. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blaney, Paul H. 1986. Affect and Memory. *Psychological Bulletin* 99 (2): 229–246.

Brosch, Tobias, Klaus Scherer, Didier Grandjean, and David Sander. 2013. The Impact of Emotion on Perception, Attention, Memory, and Decision-Making. *Swiss Medical Weekly* 143: w13786.

Bruner, Jerome S. 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. 2002. *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Cairns, Douglas. 2022. Emotions through Time? In *Emotions through Time: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. Douglas Cairns, Martin Hinterberger, Aglae Pizzone, and Matteo Zaccarini, 3–33. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Campeggiani, Pia. 2023. *Theories of Emotion: Expressing, Feeling, Acting*. London: Bloomsbury.

———. 2024. Affective Construals: What Aristotle's Moral Psychology Tells Us About Emotion. In *In the Mind, In the Body, In the World: Emotions in Early China and Ancient Greece*, ed. Douglas Cairns and Curie Virág, 155–169. New York: Oxford University Press.

Colombetti, Giovanna. 2014. *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Conway, Martin A. 2000. The Construction of Autobiographical Memories in the Self-Memory System. *Psychological Review* 107 (2): 261–288.

Conway, Martin A., Lucy V. Justice, and Arnaud d'Argembeau. 2019. The Self-memory System Revisited. Past, Present and Future. In *The Organization and Structure of Autobiographical Memory*, ed. John Mace, 28–51. New York: Oxford University Press.

Damasio, Antonio R. 2010. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. New York: Pantheon Books.

De Sousa, Ronald. 1987. *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Deonna, Julien, and Fabrice Teroni. 2009. Taking Affective Explanations to Heart. *Social Science Information* 48 (3): 359–377.

———. 2012. *The Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Doris, John. 2002. *Lack of Character*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fehr, Beverly, and James A. Russell. 1984. Concept of Emotion Viewed from a Prototype Perspective. *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 113 (3): 464–486.

Finucane, Anne M. 2011. The Effect of Fear and Anger on Selective Attention. *Emotion* 11 (4): 970–974.

Fivush, Robin, and Theodore E.A. Waters. 2019. Development and Organization of Autobiographical Memory Form and Function. In *The Organization and Structure of Autobiographical Memory*, ed. John H. Mace, 52–71. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gaddy, Melinda A., and Rick E. Ingram. 2014. A Meta-Analytic Review of Mood-Congruent Implicit Memory in Depressed Mood. *Clinical Psychological Review* 34 (5): 402–416.

Gallagher, Shaun. 2014. Self and Narrative. In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmut Gander, 403–414. London: Routledge.

———. 2020. *Action and Interaction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gallagher, Shaun, and Daniel D. Hutto. 2008. Understanding Others through Primary Interaction and Narrative Practice. In *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity*, ed. Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha, and Esa Itkonen, 17–38. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gallagher, Shaun, and Andrew M. Meltzoff. 1996. The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies. *Philosophical Psychology* 9 (2): 211–233.

Gelman, Susan, Gail Hayman, and Cristine Legare. 2007. Developmental Changes in the Coherence of Essentialist Beliefs about Psychological Characteristics. *Child Development* 78 (3): 757–774.

Gill, Christopher. 1996. *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goldie, Peter. 2000. *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2012. *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, and the Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gomez-Lavin, Javier, and Jesse Prinz. 2019. Parole and the Moral Self: Moral Change Mitigates Responsibility. *Journal of Moral Education* 48 (1): 65–83.

Gordon, Robert. 1986. The Passivity of Emotions. *Philosophical Review* 95 (3): 339–360.

Hamann, Stephan. 2001. Cognitive and Neural Mechanisms of Emotional Memory. *Trends in Cognitive Science* 5 (9): 394–400.

Harman, Gilbert. 2000. The Nonexistence of Character Traits. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100 (1): 223–226.

Harmon-Jones, Eddie, Philip Gable, and Tom Price. 2013. Does Negative Affect Always Narrow and Positive Affect Always Broaden the Mind? Considering the Influence of Motivational Intensity on Cognitive Scope. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (4): 301–307.

Haslam, Nick, Brock Bastian, and Melanie Bissett. 2004. Essentialist Beliefs about Personality and Their Implications. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30 (12): 1661–1673.

Howe, Mark. 2000. *The Fate of Early Memories: Developmental Science and the Retention of Childhood Experiences*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hutto, Daniel D. 2007. The Narrative Practice Hypothesis: Origins and Applications of Folk Psychology. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 60: 43–68.

Jirout Košová, Michaela, Robin Kopecký, Pavel Oulovský, Matej Nekvinda, and Jaroslav Flegr. 2021. My Friend's True Self: Children's Concept of Personal Identity. *Philosophical Psychology* 34 (1): 47–75.

Johnson, Mark, Suzanne Dziurawiec, Hadyn Ellis, and John Morton. 1991. Newborns' Preferential Tracking of Face-Like Stimuli and Its Subsequent Decline. *Cognition* 40 (1–2): 1–19.

Kamtekar, Rachana. 2004. Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character. *Ethics* 114 (3): 458–491.

LaBar, Kevin, and Roberto Cabeza. 2006. Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotional Memory. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 7 (1): 54–64.

Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamarque, Peter. 2004. On Not Expecting too Much from Narrative. *Mind & Language* 19 (4): 393–408.

Legerstee, Maria. 1991. The Role of Person and Object in Eliciting Early Imitation. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 51 (3): 423–433.

Libby, Lisa, and Richard Eibach. 2002. Looking Back in Time: Self-Concept Change Affects Visual Perspective in Autobiographical Memory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (2): 167–179.

Locke, John. 1689/1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Loeffler, Simone N., Michael Myrtek, and Martin Peper. 2013. Mood-Congruent Memory in Daily Life: Evidence from Interactive Ambulatory Monitoring. *Biological Psychology* 93 (2): 308–315.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Matt, Georg E., Carmelo Vazquez, and W. Keith Campbell. 1992. Mood-Congruent Recall of Affectively Toned Stimuli: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Clinical Psychology Review* 12 (2): 227–255.

Meltzoff, Andrew N. 1995. Understanding the Intentions of Others: Re-Enactment of Intended Acts by 18-Month-Old Children. *Developmental Psychology* 31 (5): 838–850.

Meltzoff, Andrew N., and M. Keith Moore. 1977. Imitation of Facial and Manual Gestures by Human Neonates. *Science* 198 (4312): 75–78.

Michaelian, Kourken. 2016. *Mental Time Travel: Episodic Memory and Our Knowledge of the Personal Past*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Papineau, David. 2016. The Foundations of Narrative. In *Art, Mind, and Narrative: Themes from the Work of Peter Goldie*, ed. Julian Dodd, 61–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phelps, Elisabeth A. 2004. Human Emotion and Memory: Interactions of the Amygdala and Hippocampal Complex. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 14 (2): 198–202.

Prinz, Jesse, and Shaun Nichols. 2016. Diachronic Identity and the Moral Self. In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind*, ed. Julian Kiverstein, 449–464. New York: Routledge.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. K. Blamey. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Robinson, Jennefer. 2018. Emotion as Process. In *The Ontology of Emotions*, ed. Hichem Naar and Fabrice Teroni, 51–70. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rosch, Eleanor. 1978. Principles of Categorization. In *Cognition and Categorization*, ed. Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd, 27–48. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rudd, Anthony. 2012. *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russell, James A. 1991. Culture and the Categorization of Emotions. *Psychological Bulletin* 110 (3): 426–450.

Schechtman, Marya. 2007. Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 60: 155–178.

———. 2011. The Narrative Self. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher, 394–416. New York: Oxford University Press.

Scherer, Klaus. 2001. Appraisal Considered as a Process of Multilevel Sequential Appraisal. In *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, ed. Klaus Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone, 92–120. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sreenivasan, Gopal. 2002. Errors About Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution. *Mind* 111 (441): 47–68.

Strawson, Galen. 2013. *The Evident Connexion: Hume on Personal Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strohminger, Nina, and Shaun Nichols. 2014. The Essential Moral Self. *Cognition* 131 (1): 159–171.

Teroni, Fabrice. 2017. The Phenomenology of Memory. In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Kourken Michaelian, 21–33. New York: Routledge.

———. 2023. Affective Selves, Streams of Consciousness and Mental Time Travels. In *Philosophical Perspectives on Memory and Imagination*, ed. Anja Berninger and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, 289–307. New York: Routledge.

Thalberg, Irwing. 1978. Mental Activity and Passivity. *Mind* 87 (347): 376–395.

Tulving, Endel. 1985. Memory and Consciousness. *Canadian Psychologist* 26 (1): 1–12.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Edited by Gertrude Elizabeth M. Anscombe. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Yonelinas, Andrew P., and Maureen Ritchey. 2015. The Slow Forgetting of Emotional Episodic Memories. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19 (5): 259–267.