The Narrative View of Personal Identity

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Questions of Personal Identity

• Metaphysical Identity

• Psychological/Social/Ethical Identity
  – Ericksonian Identity
  – Identity Politics
  – Character and Transformation
Bringing the Questions Together

• John Locke
  – “Person” is a forensic term.
  – Self-consciousness underlies forensic capacities.
  – Personal identity should be defined in terms of sameness of consciousness.

• Question: What is sameness of consciousness?
Narrative Account of Personal Identity

Initial Presentation

• We constitute ourselves as persons by forming and operating with autobiographical narratives with the form of the story of a person’s life.

• The unity of a person is the unity of an autobiographical narrative.
Characteristics of Identity-Constituting Narratives

• Narratives are largely implicit.

• Narratives are not deeply literary.

• Narratives are largely and locally accessible.

• Narratives must be accurate – but not completely so.
Rethinking the Narrative View

• The Lockeian conception of *person* is too narrow.
• Examples of non-forensic interpersonal interactions: parents and infants, adult children and parents with dementia
• Persons as units of full range of practical concerns and interactions
• Identity-constituting narrative constructed through a life lived in the network of interpersonal interactions