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# Psychological Continuity: A Discussion of Marc Slors' Account, Traumatic Experience, and the Significance of our Relations to Others

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Psychological Continuity: A Discussion of Marc Slors' Account, Traumatic Experience, and the Significance of our Relations to Others

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper addresses a question concerning psychological continuity, i.e., which features preserve the same psychological subject over time; this is not the same question as the one concerning the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity. Marc Slors (1998, 2001, 2001a) defends an account of psychological continuity that adds two features to Derek Parfit's Relation R, namely narrativity and embodiment. Slors' account is a significant improvement on Parfit's, but still lacks an *explicit* acknowledgment of a third feature that I call relationality. Because they are usually regarded as cases of radical discontinuity, I start my discussion from the experiences of psychological disruption undergone by victims of severe violence and trauma. As it turns out, the challenges we encounter in granting continuity to the experiences of violence and trauma victims are germane to those we encounter in granting continuity to the experiences of subjects in non-traumatic contexts. What is missing in the most popular accounts of psychological continuity is an explicit acknowledgment of the links that tie our psychological lives to other subjects. A more persuasive notion of psychological continuity is not only embodied and narrative, as is Slors' notion, but also explicitly relational.

## INTRODUCTION

Philosophers discuss many questions concerning personal identity<sup>1</sup> and some of these questions are not directly concerned with the notion of personal identity. My question concerns psychological continuity, i.e., which features are required to preserve the same psychological subject over time;<sup>2</sup> hence, my focus is not strictly on personal identity but rather on a notion that figures centrally in the so called psychological accounts of personal identity.<sup>3</sup> While I regard my query as significant, in my investigation I do not assume that psychological continuity provides an account of the diachronic identity of the same being,<sup>4</sup> i.e., I do not assume that a psychological account of personal identity is correct and thereby that the best account of psychological continuity answers the metaphysical question concerning the ultimate components of reality.<sup>5</sup> Suppose for example that a biological account provides the best answer to the metaphysical question of what we fundamentally are and that the diachronic identity of specific organisms provides necessary and sufficient conditions for our diachronic identity.<sup>6</sup> Accepting a biological account of our identity does not imply accepting a biological account of personhood unless one also assumes that we are persons essentially. If personhood is defined in psychological terms<sup>7</sup> and if biological identity does not require that an organism is a psychological subject during its whole existence, then persistence conditions for organisms may not provide persistence conditions for persons.<sup>8</sup> Thus, my query for the most plausible account of psychological continuity may be of interest to both those who claim and those who deny that psychological continuity provides necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity.

Marc Slors (1998, 2001, 2001a) defends an account of psychological continuity that adds two features to Derek Parfit's Relation R, namely narrativity and embodiment. Slors' account is a significant improvement on Parfit's, but still requires the explicit acknowledgment of a third

often neglected feature that I call relationality. Since they are usually regarded as examples of radical discontinuity, I start my discussion from the experiences of psychological disruption commonly undergone by victims of severe violence and trauma. As it turns out, the challenges we encounter in granting continuity to the experiences of violence and trauma victims are parallel to those we encounter in granting continuity to the experiences of subjects not undergoing violence or trauma. By asking how we can ensure psychological continuity in these more radical cases, we merely see more clearly what is missing in all current accounts of psychological continuity for they do not render explicit the links that tie our psychological lives to other subjects. A more persuasive notion of psychological continuity is not only embodied and narrative, as Slors' notion is, but also relational.<sup>9</sup>

## I. TRAUMA VICTIMS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTINUITY

At the beginning of the third chapter of her arresting book based on a deeply traumatic personal experience, Susan Brison relates statements of other survivors of violence: "I died in Auschwitz, but no one knows it," "One can be alive after Sobibor without having survived Sobibor," "I died in Vietnam," "I will always miss myself as I was." Emotions similar to the ones expressed in these quotes are expressed by Brison as well:

I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world ... I am not the same person who set off, singing, on that sunny Fourth of July in the French countryside. I left her in a rocky creek bed at the bottom of a ravine. I had to in order to survive. ... The trauma has changed me forever. (Brison 2002, 9, 21)

What makes these claims disconcerting is their *prima facie* self-contradictory nature. How can the same pronoun "I" denote both the person who is speaking now and the one who supposedly died long before? How can one be both the one missing another and the missed one? All these

expressions attempt to assert simultaneously the continuity in these persons' experience of selfhood and a radical break or change in the self. If we take the reports from trauma and violence victims seriously - and there are good reasons to take them seriously<sup>10</sup> - then any plausible notion of psychological continuity must account for their experiences,

The changes ensuing from traumas and violence are limit cases; in the normal progress of life, most of us undergo changes that alter our plans and desires, create new strands of experiences and memories - think of the experiences of an amputee or of someone who receives an organ transplant; even an operation as simple as eye laser surgery produces new visual perceptions. In all these cases, many memories and other psychological states overlap so that there is no radical change of identity. Although experiences of extraordinary violence cause deeper fracture in the psychological continuity of selves, we do not deny that these are the same people - unless metaphorically speaking<sup>11</sup> - nor do the victims fail to refer to their current selves and to the now seemingly unreachable selves of the times before the trauma or violence. Despite what trauma victims tell us about the death of their previous selves, we take them to be in some important sense the same persons they were before their traumas. We take for granted that they will return to their families and circles of friends; in most cases, we assume that they will want to resume the jobs they held before their trauma; exactly because of these assumptions, we worry whether or not they will be able to continue in their jobs and in taking care of their children and families. We do not take for granted that all such social connections and duties are expired, although we acknowledge that some victims may not be able to 'fit in' easily within their previous life contexts. To make sense of these expectations, we need a notion of psychological continuity that connects the individuals before and those after the traumas. What is needed then

is an account of psychological continuity that can ensure some connection between psychological experiences that appear to be deeply disconnected.

## II. MARC SLORS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTINUITY

The starting point of Slors' discussion is Parfit's relation R.<sup>12</sup> According to Parfit, psychological continuity or relation R is "the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness" where psychological connectedness is "the holding of particular direct psychological connections," such as the link between a perceptual experience and the memory of it, or two temporally distinct manifestations of the same personality trait, and strong connectedness obtains "if the number of direct connections, over any day, is *at least half* the number that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person" (Parfit 1984, 206). Psychological continuity is transitive, but psychological connectedness is not: "while most adults have many memories of experiences that they had in the previous day, I have few memories of experiences that I had on any day twenty years ago" (1984, 206). Slors provides an example to show that relation R does not adequately capture psychological continuity: suppose that a subject's brain is tampered every other day by destroying and replacing approximately one third of its psychological connections; then, the pre- and post- operation subjects will be, by Parfit's criterion, the same person although within a week they will have totally different psychological traits, values, plans, states, etc. (Slors 1998, 66-67). Hence, relation R produces counterintuitive results; yet, this is not its only inadequacy, in Slors' eyes.

For Slors the main shortcoming of Parfit's conception of psychological continuity is the fact that psychological traits and states are taken in isolation one from the other and their mutual independence is not conducive to a plausible representation of psychological *processes*.

Following Parfit, it is widely assumed that the mental states which constitute the links involved in psychological connectedness are mostly qualitatively similar states, a paradigmatic case of which is the relation between an experience and the memory of it. In contrast with this assumption, Slors stresses the significance of psychological *processes* and *context*:

[A]n account of psychological continuity in terms of qualitative similarity of contents cannot deal with certain kinds of continuity that consist of the temporal succession of qualitatively *dissimilar* contents. ...

The evolution of plans of action, deliberation and reasoning are examples of psychological continuity that consist of chains of temporally successive qualitatively dissimilar contents. They are *processes*. (Slors 2001, 85)

The connections I am after ... are such that psychological contents cannot be considered self-contained. (Slors 1998, 70)<sup>13</sup>

Psychological states that are part of processes cannot be accounted for with the prevailing atomistic model that works for qualitatively similar psychological states.<sup>14</sup> An atomistic presupposition is present whenever “we ... presuppose the intelligibility of ‘distinct temporally indexed psychological states’” (Slors 1998, 62). In contrast to this presupposition, Slors argues that thoughts, sense perceptions, and feelings that belong to psychological processes need to be seen within a context that can provide their full significance:

Just as a particular event in a story acquires its full sense only as part of the whole story, individual thoughts acquire their full meaning only as part of a process of deliberation, individual sense perceptions acquire their full sense only as part of a sequence of perceptions portraying a body’s movements through space, individual feelings acquire their full sense only in connection with what evoked them and what they produce, etc. (Slors 1998, 70)

Most mental states that make up the core of psychological continuity acquire their full meaning within nets of connections with other mental states; hence, the lack of an explicit acknowledgement of these mutual links leaves us with a less persuasive notion of psychological continuity. To avoid this shortcoming, Slors introduces the notion of narrative connectedness:

Narrative connectedness between particular psychological contents ... is a relation between contents such that one or more contents are a necessary prerequisite for another

content's full meaning and the intelligibility of its occurrence. Narrativity in this sense is committed to the rejection of an atomistic approach to mental states. (Slors 1998, 70)

Narrative connectedness links for example my memory of my son's request to knit him a sweater with my current desire to find a good yarn for it, with my future plans to knit the sweater, and finally with my satisfaction, way ahead in the future, when the project will be completed. Each of these states is qualitatively different, but they are not wholly independent of each other. Each of them could not be what it is, its content could not be what it is, if it were taken in isolation as "discrete and independent moments." (Schechtman 1994b, 203)<sup>15</sup>

Slors (2001) develops a comparison between Slors' notion of N-continuity<sup>16</sup> and Parfit's notions of psychological connectedness and continuity and points out that N-continuity is meant to supplement not to replace Parfit's model of connectedness.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, we have "P-connectedness" ('P' for 'preservation'), which relates qualitatively similar psychological states, for example memories of experiences or my enduring love for Iris Murdoch's novels, and which is at the basis of Parfit's relation R<sup>18</sup> and "N-continuity" ('N' for 'narrativity'), which is a transitive relation and "is defined as a sequence of mental states  $\langle m_1, \dots, m_n \rangle$  such that each  $m_i$  is only fully intelligible and meaningful in virtue of some or perhaps even all of the other mental states in the sequence" (Douven 1999, 145).<sup>19</sup> Although much work is still needed to thoroughly disambiguate the notion of N-continuity, its narrative character adds to Parfit's relation R a requirement that is very useful in discussing the psychological continuity, or lack of thereof, of trauma victims. For survivors of trauma and violence who feel alienated and 'other' from their previous selves, the possibility of rebuilding a connection between their former and previous lives requires the reconstruction of a narrative, a life story that somehow connects their past and present experiences.<sup>20</sup>



In contrast to the notion of narrativity criticized by Galen Strawson,<sup>21</sup> Slors' notion is narrower because it is not meant to apply to the whole of a being's existence:

Narrativity, as I will use it, has little to do with a story in which the 'person' is a protagonist... In my use, it applies to strings of consecutive mental states that are only parts of the total of a person's stream of consciousness. (Slors 2001, 91)

N-continuity does not require sophisticated forms of self-consciousness or literary talents. It requires the garden variety ability to connect the memory of yesterday's request of a sweater from my son with today's choice of yarn and tomorrow's beginning of the project.

The most important component of N-continuity is the 'basic' narrative composed by "our consecutive perceptual contents." (Slors 2001, 95). The anchoring of N-continuity to the output of our bodies makes psychological continuity not only plausible but also responsive to the many analytic debates about the role of the body and bodily features for our psychological states:<sup>22</sup>

I should like to ascribe a crucial role to the body in the narrative coherence of successive perceptual contents. The fact that the one body upon which consecutive perceptual contents are dependent is a physical object whose movements are subject to the regularities of the physical world is a precondition for the narrative coherence of these contents. (Slors 1998, 74)

Barring unusual circumstances, our perceptual contents are coherent: my sensing the carpet under my feet right now is followed by a similar perception when I get up to move to a different place; the visual perception of the rain drops on the window pane fits well with the tactile perception of drops falling on my hand when I go outside. My body is a physical object surrounded by a physical environment and the constant input I receive from my sense organs constructs a story whose coherence is best explained by the interaction between my body and the environment. Let us then focus on the basic narrative:

Psychological continuity, conceived as intertwining P-connectedness and N-continuity, requires what I labeled a 'basic narrative,' ... Hence, there can be no psychological continuity without bodily continuity (Slors 1998, 77)

Slors' notion of psychological continuity, which combines Parfit's P-connectedness with N-continuity, requires a basic narrative constituted by perceptual contents that come from the body. However, we should not misunderstand Slors' requirement. For, although it may seem that Slors is advocating the necessity of a body (perhaps even of the same body) in order to have a basic narrative, he explicitly denies one such inference:

[I]t is far from inconceivable that a basic narrative is provided by a mechanism other than the coherence of perceptual states caused by one body. There is no conceptual connection between N-continuity and the continuity of one body.

[B]odily continuity is a non-redundant part of a non-necessary but sufficient condition for there being a basic narrative, which in turn is a necessary but insufficient condition for there being full narrative continuity. But since bodily continuity may well turn out not to be necessary for a basic narrative, narrative continuity including the basic narrative that provides its basic structure is a form of *psychological* continuity that cannot be replaced by bodily continuity. And this is true even when, as I think is the case, psychological N-continuity in the case of all actually existing persons is co-produced by the continuity of only one body per person. (Slors 2001, 104-105)

This second passage is crucial for understanding Slors' notion of continuity. Bodily continuity, i.e., the persistence of one and the same body, is sufficient to generate a basic narrative as it produces a coherent succession of perceptual states – at least in most cases – but this is a purely contingent fact and not a conceptual link. The continuity of a particular body “may well turn out not to be necessary for a basic narrative” (2001, 104). In other words, bodily continuity is not a necessary condition for N-continuity, although the existence of some basic narrative, however it is produced, is necessary.<sup>23</sup> By denying the necessity of bodily continuity for a basic narrative, Slors denies a necessary link between the possession of one, and *a fortiori* of one and the same, body and the emergence of the stream of perceptual contents.<sup>24</sup> In the above passage, he states explicitly that “narrative continuity including the basic narrative that provides its basic structure is a form of *psychological* continuity that cannot be replaced by bodily continuity.” What matters for our continuity is a coherent sequence of perceptual input and this psychological

coherence cannot be replaced by the mere persistence of a body. For Slors, bodily perceptions are necessary components of any accurate reconstruction of our psychological experiences, but the necessity of the basic narrative does not support a bodily criterion for the diachronic identity of persons in response to the metaphysical question concerning personal identity.

In conclusion, in Slors' elaboration of the notion of psychological continuity, Parfit's relation R must be supplemented by N-continuity and N-continuity requires the inclusion of the basic narrative of the body's perceptual contents. The requirement of a narrative component for psychological continuity seems *prima facie* to fit well with the reality of how violence and trauma victims recover a continuous self, because only through therapy and the recounting of their trauma victims are able to reestablish a connection with their past experiences and previous selves. Yet, the narrative feature of Slors' notion of psychological continuity requires a basic narrative that is constituted by the sequence of body perceptions. The next section thus explores whether the embodiment requirement of Slors' account of psychological continuity is a feature that supports or denies the psychological persistence of trauma and violence victims.

### **III. SLORS' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTINUITY, EMBODIMENT, AND TRAUMA**

In our search for a notion of psychological continuity that can account for the experiences of trauma victims, I have assumed that in some plausible sense trauma victims survive after their traumatic experiences and I have provided some justification for this assumption at the end of the first section. But does Slors share such an assumption? There is ample evidence that he does. When he mentions what he takes to be the two main "difficulties inherent in contemporary conceptions" he lists as one "their inability to account for the precise degree to which we are willing to allow for *radical* psychological change while retaining personal identity" (1998, 62,

my emphasis). Slors regards having to give up the intuition that “persons can change radically in psychological respects without becoming someone else” as “more than just a slight disadvantage” for contemporary psychological continuity theories (1998, 68). In light of these statements, I believe that Slors would want his account to do better than contemporary psychological continuity theories with regard to cases of violence and trauma.

In this section, I take up two questions concerning whether the embodiment requirement in Slors’ notion of psychological continuity accommodates the experiences of trauma victims. The first question focuses on the victims’ relationship to their bodies after the trauma. With regard to this question I distinguish between the issue of what victims say about this relationship and the issue of so called *body memories*. The second question concerns whether trauma victims possess a basic narrative.

A possible difficulty for the application of Slors’ notion of continuity to trauma victims emerges from what victims say about their relationship to their bodies *after* the trauma. Victims often report of a changed and much closer relationship to their bodies; Brison for example reports that traumatic experiences alter a person’s relationship to one’s body:

I was no longer the same person I had been before the assault ... I had a different relationship with my body... body and mind had become nearly indistinguishable... The symptoms of PTSD gave the lie to a latent dualism that still informs society’s most prevalent attitude to trauma, namely, that victims should buck up, put the past behind them, and get on with their lives. My hypervigilance, heightened startle response, insomnia, and other PTSD symptoms were no more psychological, if that is taken to mean under my conscious control, than were my heartrate and blood pressure.” (2002, 44)

The distinction between what is bodily and what is psychological becomes fuzzy and although Brison seems to appeal to an unusual notion of ‘psychological’ as ‘under one’s conscious control,’ the phenomena she lists are good examples of states difficult to categorize as merely bodily or merely psychological. Whether or not and how the post traumatic bodily dispositions

of trauma and violence victims alter the basic narrative are questions I am unable to discuss. However, I see their relevance because if the basic narrative is understood as composed mostly by proprioception and if the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) alter proprioception, then the basic narrative of victims will be significantly different from that of subjects who have not undergone trauma or violence.<sup>25</sup> Brison notes how trauma cases stress the importance of the body for the self:

The study of trauma does not lead to the conclusion that the self can be identified with the body, but it does show how the body and one's perception of it are nonetheless essential components of the self. (2002, 46)

This conclusion is fully compatible with Slors' account of psychological continuity. What we can glean from the above evidence is that sense perceptions are essential components of our psychological life and accordingly they should figure centrally in any notion of psychological continuity. In Slors's account, this happens thanks to the basic narrative that is a necessary condition for narrative continuity. Thus, Slors' notion of psychological continuity fits well with the experiences of trauma victims who find that the psychological and bodily features of their experience are not easily kept distinct; this is plausibly true even for those among these victims who experience deeply altered proprioceptual input possibly caused by PTSD.

Brison also introduces the notion of *body memory*<sup>26</sup> as further evidence of a lack of distinction between the psychological and the physical:

[T]rauma not only haunts the conscious and unconscious mind, but also remains in the body, in each of the senses, ready to surface whenever something triggers a reliving of the traumatic event. ... traumatic memories ... remain in the body, in each of the senses, in the heart that races and skin that crawls whenever something resurrects the only slightly buried terror. (2002, X, 44)

Brison suggests that so called body memories survive not merely in the mind, whether in its conscious or its unconscious portion, but also in the body; hence, traumatic memories of this

type are not merely psychological.<sup>27</sup> Instead, as Brison interprets them, they may be best described as memories embodied in a *particular* body:

The bodily nature of traumatic memory complicates a standard philosophical quandary concerning which of two criteria of identity – continuous body or continuous memories – should be used to determine personal identity over time. ... If memories are lodged in the body, the Lockean distinction between the memory criterion and that of bodily identity no longer applies. (2002, 45)

Brison ties the question concerning what features of our bodily experiences must be included in a plausible account of psychological continuity with the metaphysical question concerning the accuracy of psychological or bodily criteria of personal identity. She suggests that the existence of body memories would show that our diachronic identity cannot be based on merely psychological features since a ‘continuous body’ may be necessary for some of these features to be present. As I have indicated above, I believe that these two questions should be kept separate and my concern is only with the main features of psychological continuity.

Body memories might constitute a problem for Slors’ account only if we take it to aim at providing metaphysical criteria for personal identity; for Brison suggests that the presence of body memories requires the continuity of the same body and we have seen that Slors considers the existence of the same body merely contingent for personal identity. Whether or not an answer to the *metaphysical* question of personal identity necessarily requires a bodily component is not our concern here. Furthermore, it is the task of those who conduct research on memory and trauma to find out whether some memories are ‘stored’ in the body and only afterwards are brought to consciousness in the brain.<sup>28</sup> If Slors’ account of psychological continuity is merely accepted as an account of the persistence of the same psychological subject, with no direct implications concerning a metaphysical criterion of identity, body memories need not constitute an objection to it, because there is no reason why Slors’ notion of psychological continuity could

not easily include not only psychological traces of some generic physical embodiment but also psychological traces of the persistence of one and the same body.

Let us now turn to the question whether trauma victims possess a basic narrative. In Slors's account, the basic narrative connecting our perceptual states constitutes "a lifelong narrative" (2001, 101), i.e., a continuous thread running "almost from birth to death" (1998, 77). Slors's stress on the perceptual states normally associated with proprioception seems to indicate that the perceptual input arises from a first person point of view. For violence and trauma victims, it is exactly the lack of a first person connection to their previous selves and a detachment from their body during the trauma or violence that characterizes their experience. Many trauma victims report having separated themselves from their body, having interrupted so to speak that very thread of perceptual input that leads to the creation of the basic narrative on which Slors grounds N-continuity:

Those who endure long periods of repeated torture often find ways of dissociating themselves from their bodies, that part of themselves which undergoes the torture. As the research of Herman (1992) and Terr (1994) has shown, child victims of sexual and other physical abuse often utilize this defense against annihilation of the self ... Some adult victims of rape report a kind of splitting from their bodies during the assault. (Brison 2002, 47)

Should we thus infer that trauma and violence victims experience an interruption in the basic narrative and thus fail the test for psychological continuity? The answer to this question is negative whether or not we regard victims of trauma and violence as experiencing a break in their proprioception. Slors' basic narrative is firmly grounded in proprioception and the experience of dissociation that victims experience is not usually described in terms of a lack of proprioception: there are clear declarations of the separation of the *self* from the body, but victims of torture do not deny having experienced excruciating pain. Thus even if we took quite literally the statement of dissociation of victims from their bodies, it seems that in most cases

some minimal form of basic narrative is maintained, thus granting what Slors consider a necessary condition for N-continuity. On the other side, if we believe that trauma and violence victims indeed experience an interruption in their proprioception, their case is not any different from the experiences of subjects not undergoing violence or trauma who also need to rely on inference and information provided by other human beings to reconstruct the movements of their bodies after an interruption in proprioception. In either alternative, victims do not fail the test for psychological continuity.

Although the experiences of trauma victims provide poignant cases of separation from the body, there are other less extraordinary forms of dissociation. The need to produce an objective and complete basic narrative on the basis of incomplete perceptual input is a problem we all have, e.g., when we lose consciousness, when we fall asleep or faint and the stream of our perceptual contents is interrupted. How does the basic narrative maintain coherence and continuity in these common everyday cases? Slors points out:

Consciousness *is* gappy ... Every now and then, mostly when we go to sleep, we lose consciousness. Perceptual consciousness, *ipso facto*, is also gappy. But this does not at all imply that our perceptual narratives are gappy. Usually we wake up where we went to sleep. The story of our body's movements, then, continues where it was broken off. It is not unimaginable, though, that we wake up somewhere else. In such a case we are either capable of inferring what has happened to us, or we are not. In the first case, we complete the narrative ourselves; in the second case, we *know* (rather than assume) that there is a part of the narrative that we are not aware of. At any rate, whether we are aware of it or not, the *story* that is usually told by our perceptual contents – rather than those contents *themselves* – does not allow for gaps. We may lose consciousness for a moment, but we cannot lose our bodies for a moment. Perceptual narratives, then, are incomplete subjective counterparts of complete objective narratives, and this is how we make sense of them. (2001, 98)

When the stream of perceptual contents is interrupted, we reconstruct the successive movements of our body in space and time either by inferring processes we do not remember<sup>29</sup> or by relying on the knowledge that our perceptions are the subjective counterpart of an objective process, i.e.,



the movements of our bodies in time and space.<sup>30</sup> This knowledge constitutes the “interpretive framework that endows successive perceptual contents with narrative coherence” (Slors 2001, 96). There seems to be nothing particularly difficult or different about the situation of trauma and violence victims: we all need to find ways to restore the coherence and unity of our basic narrative in lieu of gappy perceptual input.

However, this process of restoration brings to light a feature of psychological continuity, which is common to the experiences of all psychological subjects but whose importance becomes more apparent when the subject is a victim of trauma or violence, i.e., the need to relate with other human subjects. None of us can restore the coherence and continuity of our basic narrative in absolute isolation from other human beings. Perhaps, if we always woke up in the place where we fell asleep, we may not have much difficulty in inferring on our own that our body persisted in the same location for the whole time when we did not receive any perceptual input from it; however, usually the help of others is crucial in the reconstruction of gappy narratives. For example, we need to be informed before a surgical operation of the effects of anesthesia and of the hospital procedures concerning the recovery stage, in order to be able to infer that our bodies were moved into a different room from the one where we fell asleep before surgery. In most real life cases, our ability to reconstruct N-continuity despite gaps in proprioception depends on other people’s communications to us. Slors implicitly acknowledges the significance of the information that others may provide in even in radical breaks in proprioception such as body swapping cases:

Take a case in which the contents of a person’s brain are transplanted into another brain and body. If bodily continuity is a necessary prerequisite for a basic narrative, then in such a case there would be a breach in narrative psychological continuity. We can imagine the case, however, such that the role of the basic narrative is provided ... by some other psychological mechanism than perceptual representations of bodily whereabouts. For instance, it is far from unimaginable, that, if the person were *informed*

beforehand of the body-swapping operation, her expecting a radical change in proprioceptual and perceptual contents after the operation would “bridge” at least part of the narrative gap that threatens to disrupt N-continuity. Likewise, *informing the person’s peers* about the operation might result in their *confirming* the body swap and hence the N-continuity of the person at issue, a confirmation that might make the difference between confusion or even mental disintegration, on the one hand, and mental coherence and sanity, on the other (Slors 2001a, 207, my emphasis)

There is a clear similarity between my surgery example and Slors’ body swapping example: in both cases there are subjects different from those undergoing gappy proprioception that help filling the gap, thereby restoring basic narrative and regaining N-continuity. In these cases, only because of other people’s input, we are able to reconstruct the objective phenomenon of the movements of our body in space and time even if we have no subjective perceptual counterpart for that objective phenomenon.

If we interpret the information from other people as necessary for the reconstruction of bodily continuity in the above cases, then it would seem that Slors acknowledges the necessity of some form of relationality for maintaining psychological continuity. However, this is too strong a portrayal of Slors’ view. For Slors, relations with other people are mostly instrumental; other people’s input is sufficient to restore the basic narrative, but it is not necessary. Indeed, after the discussion of the body swapping cases, Slors adds:

Take a scenario in which persons change bodies every week (or day, or hour, or minute). In such a scenario, we can imagine these persons being informed about these changes so that they are able to bridge what to us would be significant gaps in N-continuity. But we can also, and perhaps better imagine this information being “wired into” their cognitive systems, in much the same way that bodily continuity is wired into ours as the rationale for processing successive perceptual contents. In either case, these persons do have a basic narrative that unifies their psychological lives. (Slors 2001a, 207-208)

The relationship with other human beings who can inform us of the whereabouts of our bodies when our consciousness is interrupted is sufficient but not necessary for psychological continuity. Just like bodily continuity, the information we obtain from other subjects is a mere

instrument that makes it possible for actual human beings to retain psychological continuity even when there are interruptions in our proprioception, but neither bodily continuity nor the relation with other human beings are the only ways in which our basic narratives can be reconstructed. If we were “wired” differently, we would not need to appeal to other beings to reconstruct complete objective narratives concerning our bodies.

In conclusion, victims’ statements concerning their enhanced closeness to their bodies after their traumas are compatible and even support Slors’ inclusion of our perceptual input among the necessary components of psychological continuity. Body memories, if they become scientifically proven, constitute a problem for Slors’ account only if it is meant to provide a metaphysical criterion for personal identity. To assure a plausible notion of psychological continuity, Slors’ account only needs to include psychological traces of perceptual input from the same body and this is an amendment that Slors’ theory can accommodate. With regard to the second issue raised against Slors’ account, many trauma victims do not possess an uninterrupted basic narrative but neither do we for the whole of our lives. When we consider the means by which we reconstruct the coherence and unity of our basic narratives, it becomes clear that an important component must be made more explicit in Slors’ account of psychological continuity, i.e., the broad dependence of our psychological life on our relations to other human beings. This is not big news for trauma and violence victims, because it is well known that in many cases only their relations to others allow victims to reconstruct some degree of continuity with their previous selves.<sup>31</sup> What is new is that the discussion of the challenge to grant psychological continuity to victims of trauma and violence makes more apparent the fact that relationality is at least instrumental in warranting everybody’s persistence.

## THE RELATIONAL FOUNDATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTINUITY

In the previous section, we have seen how our relations with other human beings play a crucial role in our ability to restore or reconstruct basic narratives that have been interrupted. In this section, I defend the stronger claim that relationality is not merely instrumental or sufficient for psychological continuity, but also necessary: our relations to others are significant not merely for the basic narratives but for all features of psychological continuity. Accordingly, Slors' account must be amended: its main features, i.e., Parfit's Relation R, N-continuity, and the basic narrative, all need some level of intersubjective interaction.

Slors is well aware of the non-atomistic nature of mental states and recognizes that they are best understood and fully significant within the contexts of other mental states, whether similar or dissimilar, whether causally or non-causally connected with each other; yet, he does not explicitly acknowledge that the mental states of individual subjects depend for their character and content on a network of relations with other subjects. In defining psychological continuity, analytic philosophers appeal to experiences, memories of experiences, psychological states and traits, but these experiences, memories and traits become what they are, what we call them, what we recognize them for only within a network of social relations.<sup>32</sup> What makes an experience what it is, i.e., its psychological character, is due to interpretations and meanings generated within our relations with other human beings. Naomi Scheman provides a good example of such dependence with regard to anger: "not just anyone can be angry at any time, since part of what constitutes the pattern that counts as anger has to do with who you are and whom you might be thought to be angry at, about what, and so on" (Scheman 2011, 93).<sup>33</sup> The role that social contexts play in explanation of human behavior is an especially important source of the dependence of psychological states on social contexts: "[The] identity [of mental states] as

complex entities is relative to explanatory schemes that rely on social meaning and interpretation” (Scheman 2011, 98). The fundamental dependence of our mental states on the existence of a shared network of meanings, i.e., on a shared language in the context of whose use we learn to describe our mental states, makes the very existence of a sequence of mental states a byproduct of our linguistic and non-linguistic interactions with other human beings.

Wittgenstein’s denial of a necessarily private language rests on the impossibility of a wholly private baptism of sensation S:<sup>34</sup> we cannot be isolated creators of reference, not even to our own psychological states. Experiences become of pain or of joy or of boredom through a learning process that includes language and practices within social groups.<sup>35</sup> Even the very definition of what constitutes a trauma or a victim depends on socially negotiated conceptualizations and linguistic descriptions.<sup>36</sup>

With regard to memory, Slors’ criticism of Parfit’s atomistic conception of the mental states linked by memory correctly points out the limited attention given to processes in analysis of psychological continuity (Slors 2001, 86), but misses their relational nature:

[R]esearchers in the sciences and across the humanities now stress the dynamic, embodied, reconstructive and *social* nature of human recollection. ... *we remember with others and in response to their perceptions of the past*. ... [memory theorists] have increasingly turned attention to the contextual factors of memory’s occasionings – to the where, why, how, and *with whom* we remember – as *necessary* to explain our sophisticated memory capacities and as contributing to the meaning of recollective events. (Campbell 2009, 213, my emphasis)<sup>37</sup>

Current scientific research stresses the reconstructive and holistic nature of our remembering:

[M]uch recent psychological literature on memory stresses the construction that goes on in memory and argues against the “snapshot” (or “videotape” or “flashbulb”) model of memory. (Brison 2001, footnote 11, 132)<sup>38</sup>  
Scientists now explain that our memories do not faithfully reproduce past scenes. Instead, we combine information from various times in our past with information from the present, and with general knowledge, our imaginings, and *the views of others* to creatively reconstruct a rendering of our past experience. (Campbell 2003, 5, my emphasis)

Memories arise from a process of reconstruction one of whose necessary conditions is interaction with other human beings. Notice also that the nature of memories reinforces the need for another core aspect of Slors' psychological continuity, i.e., the embodied nature of mental states.

Embodiment is perhaps the feature of Slors' notion of psychological continuity, which *prima facie* may seem to require an intersubjective dimension the least for we may think that the stream of our perceptions suffices to give us the basic narrative required by Slors' account. Yet, we have seen in the previous section, that the continuity of a basic narrative for all subjects, not only for trauma victims, requires reconstructions that we cannot carry out in isolation. Furthermore, there is no isolated body which is the objective counterpart to our subjective perceptions and which provides experiences outside of any social context.<sup>39</sup> Not only our own expectations affect our perceptions – e.g., when we see black spades in a deck of cards in which the spades are actually red - but also other people's expectations of us do so. Much work has been done on the social construction of body images; on how such models are interiorized and influence our bodily experiences.<sup>40</sup> For example, the lived experience of having a female body is determined by physiological or idiosyncratically individual features, but also by social models and expectations that mold the lived embodied experiences of individual perceivers, especially when socially salient features such as gender, race and disability come into play.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the embodied narrative imports a net of social relations into psychological continuity.

Narratives are mentioned in various philosophical debates,<sup>42</sup> but their relational origin is seldom explicitly acknowledged.<sup>43</sup> The construction of any psychological content for our continuous life as persons requires a context of meanings and connections to other subjects without which we cannot be persons in either of the Lockean senses, i.e., either from the point of view of our mental and intellectual life or from the forensic and moral point of view.<sup>44</sup>

Narratives are constructed on the basis of mental states, memories, and perceptual inputs that are in turn all dependent on social contexts. Hence, if a narrative is a necessary component of psychological continuity and the construction of a narrative requires social relations, an adequate notion of psychological continuity must explicitly acknowledge the role of relationality. This is particularly important for many trauma or violence victims because the relational character of their narratives becomes the only way for them to preserve some psychological continuity:

In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured. (Brison 2001, 51)

Narratives constructed with the help of others play a fundamental role in the repair and reconstruction of shattered selves;<sup>45</sup> such narratives allow victims of trauma to develop some connection with their previous selves (Davis 2005).<sup>46</sup> The psychological literature already emphasizes the crucial role that interactions with others play in enabling trauma victims to reconstruct some kind of narrative of their life, but the focus is usually on the so called self, perhaps one's biography, like in this statement by Brison: "[T]o the extent that bearing witness reestablishes the survivor/s identity, the empathic other is essential to the continuation of a self" (Brison 2002, 59). As we have seen in the previous section, relations with others are significant in everyone's reconstruction of what Slors' calls a basic narrative, i.e., a narrative focused on perceptual contents. N-continuity must be amended to explicitly include both biographical and basic narratives whose creation requires relations to other subjects. Although I hesitate to require a relational condition for all narratives, for from a logical point of view there seem to be nothing wrong with the idea of a Robinson Crusoe producing his own biographical narrative without any help from other subjects, the most plausible notion of psychological continuity

applicable to actual subjects requires a context of social relations which always provides them with meaning and sometimes supplements their basic narratives when they have been interrupted, as it is the case with trauma and violence as well as with sleep.

In conclusion, all the features that Slors lists as contributing to maintain the persistence of a person require relations with other subjects:

What this 'narrativity-constraint' suggests, is that one's present person stage is not just continuous with earlier ones because of direct conscious access (memory), sameness of mental contents, or overlapping chains of connectedness. Rather, one's present person stage is continuous with earlier ones because it is part of a biographical narrative these earlier states were part of: because one's present beliefs are the successors of earlier ones via deliberation and conscious thinking, because one's present values evolved out of earlier ones, because one's present sensory experiences are intelligible only as parts of a basic narrative that is 'written' by one's body's whereabouts... To ask whether or not a person-stage is continuous with another is to ask whether the later stage can be understood as being part of a larger biographical narrative of which the former was a part. (1998, 78, my emphasis)

As isolated individuals, many, perhaps most, trauma victims cannot satisfy several conditions listed in this passage, e.g., they cannot reconstruct a narrative which weaves their earlier with their later stages and they do not share beliefs and values with their former selves. While undergoing violence, many victims cope by separating from their bodies and thus there may be no basic narrative arising from the coherence of their perceptual states to provide psychological continuity. However, without explicitly acknowledging the significance of our relations to others in providing meaning and context as well as in restoring interrupted basic narratives, Slors's notion of psychological continuity cannot accommodate even the experiences of subjects who have not undergone trauma. To reconstruct the narrative *written by one's body's whereabouts* requires the reconstruction of memories and experiences which none of us can perform without relying on the testimony of others.



#### IV. CONCLUSION

My overall goal is to construct a plausible account of psychological continuity; I have argued that Slors' notion of psychological continuity is an improvement on Parfit's Relation R because it includes some crucial dimensions of the human experience, such as its embodied and narrative nature. Although Slors' account is an improvement on Parfit's, it still fails to take into account the relational or social dimensions of our psychological life and yet each main feature of his account is in some form or another fundamentally relational. Contemporary research on memory suggests that it is relational; psychological states are constituted by their social contexts; self-perception of embodiment is affected by social meanings and norms; gaps in perceptual input are filled only on the basis of the testimony of others and of our intersubjectively shared trust in the persistence of physical objects; the construction of a personal narrative is rarely if ever realized in total isolation from other human beings. Accordingly, Slors' psychological continuity does not capture all the core aspects of the human self; in the case of many violence and trauma victims, Slors' account lacks the very feature, which makes such victims the same psychological subject before and after the trauma; for it is only through social interactions that fractured or damaged identities are able to recapture some continuity.

The construction of a plausible notion of psychological continuity is a worthwhile project even if the debate on the necessary and sufficient conditions for our numerical identity were to be decided in favor of a non-psychological criterion of identity, e.g., if being a person is a property of an organism and if persons are not independently existing substances. Also in this case, it is important to find out what psychological characteristics are relevant in determining the qualitative diachronic identity of those phases of our existence during which we are persons. The

best tool to determine when a person persists through time is a notion of psychological continuity that takes into accounts the embodied, narrative and relational features of our experiences.<sup>47</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Marya Schechtman (1996, 1-2, 73) singles out two questions concerning identity: the reidentification question that is analogous to the so-called question of *persistence*, i.e., what it takes for a person to persist through time as the same being, and the characterization question that “asks which actions, experiences, beliefs, values, desires, character traits, and so on ... are to be attributed to a given person.” Eric Olson (2008) and Logi Gunnarsson (2010, 18-25) list two sets of eight questions on personal identity; see also Merrick 1998, 107-109 and Noonan 1989, 2.

<sup>2</sup> In Gunnarsson’s listing, this might be captured by questions 7 and 8, i.e., what is a person from a descriptive point of view and what is that bestows moral status on a person; see Gunnarsson 2010, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Derek Parfit’s discussion of what matters for survival in his 1984 is a good example: psychological continuity or Relation R is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for personal identity since the further condition of uniqueness is necessary for a complete account of personal identity.

<sup>4</sup> This is what most analytic philosophers understand to be the ultimate goal of their discussions of psychological continuity; see Gunnarsson 2010, footnote 15, 196, and footnote 1, 199.

<sup>5</sup> This is Gunnarsson’s question 1 or “What am I fundamentally?” see 2010, 18. Gunnarsson denies that the metaphysical question must be answered by providing substance concepts since “[W]hat I am fundamentally may not be anything that is somehow ontologically fundamental... what I am fundamentally may not be a substance” see 2010, footnote 8, 196.

<sup>6</sup> Views analogous to this are defended in Carter 1980, 1988, and Olson 1997.

<sup>7</sup> The *locus classicus* for a psychological criterion of personhood is section 9, Chapter 27, Book II of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he defines a person as “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places” see Locke 1975, 335. This is not the only definition of ‘person’ offered by Locke. A less frequently quoted definition, stated in section 26 of the same Book II of the *Essay*, reads: “*Person*, as I take it, is the name of this self. Wherever a man finds what he calls *himself*, there, I think, another may say is the same person. It is a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery” ; see Locke 1975, 346. In this second definition, Locke stresses a social or legal dimension of persons at the center of which is their being either moral agents or objects of moral regard. Since Locke’s first definition has dominated the literature on personhood, in the remainder of this paper, I will use this term mostly to mean a psychological subject. However, the richer notion of psychological continuity that I propose might be able to incorporate both dimensions of personhood reflected in Locke’s definitions.

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<sup>8</sup> If being a person is a property like being an athlete or a philosopher, then in giving the persistence conditions for a person, we do not need to give the persistence conditions for a substance: we can ask what it takes to be the same person over time even if the necessary and sufficient conditions we give will not be conditions for being a type of substance but rather conditions for maintaining a certain property. According to most critics, in giving his psychological account of personhood, Locke also denies that it requires the persistence of either physical or spiritual substances. Finally, if Gunnarsson is correct, it may be the case that even in answering the question of what we fundamentally are it is not necessary to give persistence conditions for any substance. See Gunnarsson 2010, footnote 15, 96.

<sup>9</sup> One may question why, in my attempt to account for the continuity of the subjective experience of trauma and violence victims, I focus on accounts of psychological continuity rather than consider other non-psychological accounts such as Dainton and Bayne's 2005 phenomenal continuity or McMahan's 2002 account according to which enough of the same brain needs to persist and function in order to support the same consciousness. Slors' account is an improvement on what is commonly regarded as the best developed account of psychological continuity; this is the focus of my discussion. Both Dainton and Bayne and McMahan present promising ways to address the metaphysical question of personal identity, which is not my focus. Furthermore, although phenomenal and psychological continuity are categorically different types of continuity, I believe that Slors' basic narrative captures much of the specificity of Dainton and Bayne's phenomenal continuity. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this question.

<sup>10</sup> I agree with the recommendation to look at real life cases of dramatic psychological changes as significant for the debate on personal identity; see Wilkes 1988, Brison 2002), Schechtman 1996, 2007, and Mackenzie 2009. After drawing a distinction between two categories of thought experiments and puzzle cases used in the philosophical debate on personal identity, Schechtman states that while thought experiments are used "essentially to show that personal identity should be defined in terms of psychological rather than physical features," real life cases play a more complex role, "by showing that the right kind or degree of psychological change within a human life threatens identity" but also by speaking "to the more complicated question of what psychological continuation involves." See Schechtman 2007, 95-96. This second goal is the main thrust of this paper and this is also one reason why I start my discussion from an examination of real life cases like trauma and violence.

<sup>11</sup> Initially, Schechtman seems to partially agree on this: "In the ordinary cases ... it may seem at best metaphorical to say that the psychological change described threatens personal survival." However, after distinguishing between "*genuine*" and "subtle" survival, she claims that "[a]lthough the kind of survival at issue ... may not be the absolutely most basic sense, it is nonetheless one which is deeply important in our lives. It is this more subtle form of survival which is most deeply intermeshed with the many significant practical implications of personal continuation such as morality, self-interested concern, autonomy and authenticity." See Schechtman 2007, 98. Schechtman's distinction between genuine and subtle survival may parallel the distinction I draw between the metaphysical problem of personal identity and the problem of finding a persuasive notion of psychological continuity. If this is correct, issues surrounding subtle survival are relevant to my notion of psychological continuity. In the remainder of Schechtman's paper it becomes apparent that she may be more willing than I am to claim that the disruption of psychological continuity trauma and violence victims undergo may actually and not merely

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metaphorically destroy their continuity as the same psychological subject. I provide in the text some reasons to reject the view that trauma or violence victims are radically different psychological subjects and that their previous selves have not survived the experience. I believe my position is the most challenging and yet the most plausible, but cannot here fully discuss the opposing view. As I mention later on in the paper, Slors agrees with me on the need to provide an account of psychological continuity that maintains the survival of victims of radical and traumatic changes.

<sup>12</sup> I assume that Slors focuses his discussion on Parfit's relation R because he regards it as the main competitor for the most plausible notion of psychological continuity available in the contemporary debate. A philosopher whose work has greatly influenced the development of the notion of psychological continuity is Sydney Shoemaker. I do not discuss Shoemaker's views on psychological continuity here for two main reasons: Slors' compares his view with Parfit's and Parfit's distinction between psychological continuity and connectedness and the notion of quasi-memory capture Shoemaker's most important contributions to the discussion of psychological continuity.

<sup>13</sup> "[C]ontinuity between qualitatively dissimilar contents, process-like continuity or continuity in virtue of intelligible succession, has not been given its philosophical due by some, or even most philosophers." (Slors 2001, 86)

<sup>14</sup> In agreement with Slors, Schechtman claims that Parfit's account presupposes an "overly atomistic view of our psychological life" for it works only "if all of a person's psychological features are so independent of one another that any of them can be changed without changing any of the others." (Schechtman 1996, 45)

<sup>15</sup> The holistic nature of memory also supports a narrative account of psychological continuity. We have empirical evidence that memory, i.e., "autobiographical experience memory," which is the first person recollection of past experience at the basis of our psychological life, does not relate discrete and independent moments; see Schechtman 1994a, 7. Since memory has a crucial role in psychological continuity, this latter notion needs to be altered accordingly. Slors supports the thesis that memory requires "a psychobiographical, narrative background within which to locate other memories" and cites the same studies listed in Schechtman 1994a; see Slors 1998, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Slors redubs narrative connectedness as N-continuity because of its transitivity; see Slors 1998, 71.

<sup>17</sup> "I argued that psychological connectedness and narrative continuity on all levels are intertwined;" see Slors 1999, 152; "I will argue against the view that Parfitian continuity can stand on its own and for the view according to which it should be complemented." (Slors 2001, 85-86)

<sup>18</sup> Is Parfit's relation R really based only or mostly on atomistic and qualitatively similar states as Slors claims? I do not discuss this question and take as my starting point Slors' attempt to improve on relation R. If a more integrated view of mental states similar to Slors' is already included in Parfit's view, this is further support for the need of a feature such as Slors' N-continuity to render more explicit this integration of mental states.

<sup>19</sup> Igor Douven provides this tentative formal definition of N-continuity; he laments the lack of greater precision on Slors' part: "it is unclear from [Slors'] paper whether a narrative is a sequence of mental

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states  $\langle m_1, \dots, m_n \rangle$  such that each  $m_i$  is only fully intelligible and meaningful in virtue of *some* or in virtue of *all* of the other mental states in the sequence, or whether each mental state is to be intelligible in virtue of some/all of the other mental states in the *entire* sequence or only in the part of the sequence *preceding* it.” See Douven 1999, footnote 2, 145. Douven is correct in pointing out that what Slors says could be differently interpreted and provides some useful elaboration. Neither in his 1999 reply to Douven nor in his 2001 or 2001a, Slors mentions or corrects Douven’s tentative definition.

<sup>20</sup> Narratives have a central role in the repair of ‘damaged’ identities, see Lindemann Nelson 2001. Since I focus on identities damaged by trauma and violence, I do not discuss the cases Lindemann discusses, which focus on collective and/or social damage caused to identities. Nonetheless, such cases clearly provide additional support for the necessity of taking narrativity as a necessary feature of psychological continuity. Moreover, Lindemann’s strategies to repair damaged identities require the additional feature of relationality for which I also argue.

<sup>21</sup> “[T]alk of narrative is intensely fashionable in a wide variety of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, theology, anthropology, sociology, political theory, literary studies, religious studies, psychotherapy and even medicine.” See Strawson 2004, 428. Strawson’s claim that not all people experience their life as a story is *prima facie* convincing although Strawson’s parsing out of writers and philosophers in the Episodics or non-narrative and Diachronics or narrative camps seems speculative. In Strawson’s discussion narrative is a strongly intellectualized and literary notion; see 2004, 429 and it requires a high degree of self consciousness and thorough familiarity with introspection. If these are prerequisites for possessing a continuous psychological life then it is possible that there are many beings that we regard as persons whose experience is not psychologically continuous. If a narrative account must provide a framework for psychological continuity it must be a more widely accessible type of narrative. For other criticisms of the narrative account see Christman 2004 and Lamarque 2004.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the problem created by the rough features of the peasant in expressing the “fastidious arrogance” of the emperor in Williams 1973, 11-12; see also Quinton 1963, 399.

<sup>23</sup> See also: “a basic narrative is a necessary condition for full-blown N-continuity. But since bodily continuity is only sufficient (given a properly functioning cognitive system) for such a basic narrative and not logically necessary, N-continuity is strictly a form of psychological continuity. It is not bodily continuity in disguise, despite the fact that in our actual world N-continuity does require bodily continuity” (Slors 2001a, 208).

<sup>24</sup> See also: “I do not want to claim that psychological continuity as a whole requires the continuity of an objective continuant or body. I only claim that N-continuity of perceptual contents does. The narrative unity that perceptual contents provide... is necessary but not sufficient for full blown psychological continuity. ... I do not take it as a *conceptual* truth that the diachronic unity of mind that constitutes personal identity over time – according to a psychological criterion – requires a perceptual narrative for which bodily continuity, in turn, is a prerequisite. It may well be an *empirical* fact, though, that the diachronic unity of mind of all actual persons is secured for a large part through bodily continuity” (2001, 96-97); and again: “I should like to ascribe a crucial role to the body in the narrative coherence of successive perceptual contents of *actual* persons” (2001, 98, my emphasis).

<sup>25</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

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<sup>26</sup> In discussing the experiences of victims of sexual abuses, Davis also mentions the notion of *body memory*: “Some therapists also argue that the body can signal abuse memories: ‘When a person experiences a traumatic event, the memory of that event is stored both physically and emotionally in the body. Any association to the original trauma can trigger the memory emerging either as a bodily reaction (body memory) or as an emotional reaction’ (Weiner and Kurpius 1995, p. 136). Therapists help clients recover memories, based on such ‘wordless’ experiences by interpreting them. Physical symptoms may be interpreted as psychosomatic indicators of abuse experiences – as ‘somatic experiences that symbolically represent some aspect of the original traumas’ (Davies and Frawley 1994, p. 99). In each case, the therapist treats somatic experiences as an ‘unfamiliar language’ that, together with the client, he must listen to and interpret (211).” (Davis 2005, 181)

<sup>27</sup> An anonymous referee rightly pointed out that by mentioning the conscious and unconscious mind in the quoted passage, Brison already points out a plausible rejoinder to the claim of the existence of bodily memories: perhaps these memories are stored in the unconscious mind and they are thus psychological in a broad sense. I do not pursue this point because the existence of bodily memories is controversial; I discuss them merely because I want to provide as thorough a critical analysis of Slors’ notion of psychological continuity as I can.

<sup>28</sup> For an attack on the scientific value of bodily memories, especially with regard to cases of repressed incest and sexual abuse, see Smith 1993. I thank Alex Hoyt for helping me to locate this resource.

<sup>29</sup> “[O]nce [the capacity to interpret our sense impressions in terms of their depicting a coherent world-picture are] developed, we are able to infer parts of the history of our bodies we forgot or did not even experience.” (Slors 2001, 101)

<sup>30</sup> “Knowing that ... there is a fact of the matter as to what perceptual experiences we have had at which time, is enough either to remember, or to infer a specific simple biographical narrative for each person.” (Slors 2001, 102)

<sup>31</sup> It is conceivable that some victims of trauma and violence never recover a narrative and are thus unable to maintain continuity; quite aptly, in my view, Slors comments that confirmation from others “might make the difference between confusion and even mental disintegration, on one hand, and mental coherence and sanity, on the other.” (Slors 2001a, 207) I am open to the possibility that there might be degrees of psychological continuity, as it is made clear by the progression of illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease. One troubling consequence of this position is of course the need to also allow for degrees of personhood. If ‘person’ is defined only in psychological terms, this consequence is not as troubling as if we define it in moral terms like Locke’s second definition. I thank an anonymous referee for asking these insightful questions.

<sup>32</sup> “[I]t is in society that people acquire their memories.... It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.” (Halbwachs 1992, 38), cited in Brison 2002, 31; “[memory realizes] in specific, socially embedded bodies.” (Scheman 2011, 82)

<sup>33</sup> Scheman defends a relational view of emotions in several of her writings: “[E]motions (along with other complex mental ‘states,’ such as beliefs, attitudes, desires, intentions, and so on) are not states of individuals” (2011, 97); “beliefs, desires, emotions, and other phenomena of our mental lives are the

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particulars that they are because they are socially meaningful, and when they figure as those particular in causal account, neither those accounts nor the phenomena that figure in them survive abstraction from social context” (Ibidem, 83-85)

<sup>34</sup> “[W]hen we speak of someone’s having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word ‘pain’; it shews the post where the new word is stationed” Wittgenstein 1953, § 257ff.

<sup>35</sup> “[T]he objects of the social sciences, including psychology, are ... objects only with respect to socially embodied norms” (Scheman 1983, 227-228); “... experience is a linguistic event (it does not happen outside established meanings,” (Scott 1992, 34); “Events happen. But they can be described in countless ways and they are experienced under some descriptions and not others.” (Brison 2002, 33)

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Davis, although in no way denying the reality of the trauma experienced by the victims of sexual violence, claims that the emotions that define victims and perpetrators are socially constructed (2005).

<sup>37</sup> Campbell cites Sutton (2004) and Wertsch (2002) as sources of “useful overviews of current interdisciplinary trends in memory research” (Ivi)

<sup>38</sup> On recovered memory therapy, see Hacking 1995, Loftus and Ketcham 1994, and Terr 1994.

<sup>39</sup> On a similar note, Kathy Davis writes, “Cultural variation in embodiment and bodily practices show just how untenable the notion of a ‘natural body’ is, making the body an ideal starting point for a critique of universality, objectivity or moral absolutism” (Davis 1997, 4).

<sup>40</sup> Feminist literature on embodiment is quite extended. For just one example of a study that links the social construction of bodies with the individual’s experience, see Young 1990.

<sup>41</sup> “The history of women’s bodies has been mapped in various areas of social life and attention has been devoted to how institutions and cultural discourses shape women’s embodied experiences.” (Davis 1997, 5)

<sup>42</sup> “In philosophy, reference to the narrative structure of lives or personalities appears in a variety of settings: theories of personal identity, views about the nature of selves or the unity of consciousness, and social and political theories specifying the communitarian or socially embedded conditions of personhood (Schechtman 1996, Dennett 1988 and 1989, Flanagan 1996, MacIntyre 1981, and Taylor 1991). In these contexts, and in a variety of ways, the view is proffered that something called “narrativity” is an identifiable characteristic of the sequence of memories, reflections, actions, mental events or other such factors that marks them out as unified and individualized. Narrativity is meant to help explain what it means to be a unique, individualized subject of experiences, as opposed to a dissociated, disconnected series of selves” (Christman 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Two notable but not exclusive exceptions are Cavarero 2000 and Lindemann Nelson 2001.

<sup>44</sup> For a relational view of personhood, see Sherwin 2009, especially pp. 150-154.

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<sup>45</sup> Brison spells out how the construction of a narrative becomes the only way by which trauma victims can reconstruct their selves after the break of continuity resulting from trauma and violence; see Brison 2000, 51-59. Hilde Lindemann Nelson argues that counterstories, i.e., stories that resist an oppressive identity and attempt to replace it with one that commands respect can repair “damaged identities” (2001). It is important to note that for Nelson, both the narrative and the social or relational dimension are constitutive of a counterstory.

<sup>46</sup> The psychological literature emphasizes the crucial role that interactions with others play in enabling trauma victims to reconstruct some kind of narrative of their life, but usually the focus is not on the reconstruction of what Slors’ calls a basic narrative, i.e., a narrative focused on perceptual contents, but on the so called self, one’s biography: “[T]o the extent that bearing witness reestablishes the survivor/s identity, the empathic other is essential to the continuation of a self.” (Brison 2002, 59)

<sup>47</sup> Writing this paper took a long time; the main intuition behind its argument has produced many drafts which were presented at different conferences in Europe and in the USA. I am deeply grateful to several scholars for their help and encouragement, in particular Marya Schechtman and Hilde Lindemann Nelson, three anonymous referees of this journal, and especially my husband and colleague Lory Lemke.

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