COGNITIVE CONSTITUENTS OF CHARACTER

by

AUSTIN BENNETT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Cognitive Science

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

January, 2014
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We hereby approve the thesis of ______ Austin Bennett_____

candidate for the ____Master of Arts____ degree *.

____ Mark Turner ___.

____ Todd Oakley ___.

____ Florin Berindeanu ___.

(date) __23rd of May, 2013__.

*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.
Cognitive Constituents of Character

Abstract

By

AUSTIN BENNETT

Characters abound; in this work I will discuss several aspects of character and identity. Examples will be drawn from a variety of literature, and we will see some real world implications.
Cognitive Constituents of Character

Our lives are full of characters, people of varying types and walks of life. Due to the complex nature of character, some of the cognitive constituents will be discussed and an attempt will be made to clearly connect the related parts. Construal of characters, with respect to frames, can have life and death consequences (or be less severe). Maintaining personal identity over time is a non-trivial matter. This essay will address how to make sense of this in the light of numerical and qualitative identity. We use names to refer to characters, albeit only portions of their entirety. A rudimentary folk-psychology is at work in all humans and it is through these crude models that we determine ourselves in relation to others (and at times as another).

The discussion will draw on examples from Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, Fleming’s James Bond, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Maupassant’s *Deux Amis*. Lewis Carroll’s text will be used as an excerpt for examples of self over time as well as understanding what it might be like as another. Fleming’s work is valuable for seeing a prime example of a character type being set through repeated example. A character type can be so strong that it is able to not be at the mercy of the context but rather to shape the world by nature of just being. Through *Hamlet*, examples are given illustrating the different ways we can learn about an individual character. And *Deux Amis*, is a striking demonstration of situational forces bearing down on specific characters.
The next section here will discuss numerical and qualitative identity, which is an important distinction that will come throughout the rest of the paper.

Numerical and Qualitative Identity

Identity has been debated throughout much of the history of philosophy. In this context, the concept of identity will be used to illuminate shades of conceptual uniqueness (and similarity). Two types of identity will be contrasted, numerical identity and qualitative identity. These both have to do with different types of ‘sameness’1. Numerical Identity is used to refer to singularity. Qualitative Identity, on the other hand, has to do with specified features. For example, Bruce Wayne and Batman are the same, at least in many respects; the names refer to the same body, and they share many of the same qualities2. Some basic examples in order to elucidate this distinction:

1 Identity comes from the Latin Identitus, meaning ‘sameness’. It should come as no surprise that there are different senses of sameness that are available to us.
2 The argument can certainly be made that Batman and Bruce Wayne do (always) occupy the same space at the same time; though when choosing to refer by one or another we are highlighting the aspects of that numerically unique individual we wish to refer. Gibbard offers a notion of ‘contingent identity’, it was meant to challenge Kripke’s notion of names as being rigid designators across all possible worlds. Gibbard writes, “In rare cases, at least, one thing will be of two different kinds, with different persistence criteria, and whereas one proper name refers to it as a thing of one kind, another proper name will refer to it as a thing of another kind” (195). We can apply more than one name to a complex concept of a person; Bruce Wayne and Batman both refer selectively to same body -- to the same person in a grander sense (here I use person to refer to a collection of characteristics, including attributed character). Identity over time which must also be addressed (it is later in this paper); Bruce Wayne has existed much longer than Batman. Parts of the rest of this paper will attempt to wrangle some of these issues. I would claim that the whole of the person who Bruce Wayne and Batman both refer is a numerically unique concept. When getting more fined grained we can see that it is perhaps misleading to describe Bruce Wayne and Batman as numerically identical to each other. Simply put though, numerical identity has to do with conceptual uniqueness, it is heavily linked to the physical but that is not the sole defining
(1) Help! We’re dating the same girl!

(2) I’ll have the same [dish] as him.

(3) I need 30 sophomore psychology students to participate in this research.

Example (1) illustrates Numerical Identity. The girl we are both dating would have the same name\(^3\), and certainly has the same body. It would be an exceptional circumstance for us both to be able to be out with her simultaneously\(^4\).

The default reading of “Help! We’re dating the same girl” is contextually driven through the use of the imperative “Help!” It could be quite troubling to find out we have both fallen for the same, that is numerically distinct, girl\(^5\). Examples (2) and (3) demonstrate Qualitative Identity. In example 2, for instance, if we were uttering this in a restaurant, we will not have the same precise, physical plate or slice of cake, but we are referring to the singular, qualitative identity of the dish. In this case, perhaps he ordered a slice of chocolate cake, and I would like one too. With respect to ordering chocolate cake, the speaker hadn’t stated a preference for an edge piece criterion. Any further discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this particular work.

---

\(^3\) We may not know that fact. She could have tricked us by telling me she was Sally and telling my friend she was Mary.

\(^4\) We likely went on dates that did not occur co-temporally. Perhaps we discovered that we were dating the same (numerically) girl because of her name, or the three of us happened to be at the same place at the same time.

\(^5\) My friend and I could easily be dating the same type of girl, and alternate readings would lead to this more likely conclusion. Our two girlfriends could have the same haircut, be members in the same sorority, listen to the same music, have the same tattoo, or share any of a number of other qualities. They would be qualitatively identical, that is they would be the same with respect to those particularities.
with lots of frosting or a middle piece so we must assume that it is unimportant. Qualitative identity has to do with the qualities or properties associated with a concept. Concepts may only be numerically identical with ‘themselves’ but can be qualitatively identical to a number of others. Example (3) may make this even clearer. For the research I am to do, I need sophomore psychology students. Whether the first subject that shows up is male or female it doesn’t matter and that goes for each additional participant. The determination of qualitative identity is facilitated by understanding a concept in context, in a situation, in a frame. The next section will focus on the interplay of characters and frames.

**Characters and Frames**

Fauconnier and Turner tell us about the codependence of characters and frames: “frames and characters are interlocking aspects of human reality. You can’t have one without the other, although in some cases the emphasis falls more on character and in other cases it falls more on the frame” (253). We can use one of

---

6 When saying we want the same something, it winds up not being absolutely clear the extent of the qualities to which we are referring; with respect to ordering a piece of cake, Grice would presumably tell us that it is up to us as speakers to specify the extent of the qualitative identity in which we are interested (see Grice, and Sperber and Wilson).

7 This is true for concepts of individual *tokens*, which I wish to speak of and not of *types*. Concepts referring to categories (e.g. cats) are not to be covered by this statement.

8 There are other methodological reasons that having a balance between the sexes may be important, but 'sophomore psychology students’ can have varying sex. Since this was not a criteria outlined as part of my research, it is not important. What I am trying to illustrate is that qualitative identity has to do with category membership; each individual can be a member of a wide variety of categories and when two individual concepts belong to the same category they can be said to be qualitatively identical (just with respect to that attribute). See Rosch for a contemporary understanding of fuzzy categories.

9 See Goffman’s Frame Analysis; also for frames and language see Fillmore.
these to help us understand the counterpart. As they write, "To clarify a single frame, fill it with different essential characters; to clarify the relationship between frames, fill them with the same essential character; and to clarify essential character, transport it across different frames" (252). In other words, we can understand frames in more detail by contrasting when qualitatively different characters occupy the same frame. For example, we observe several people ordering, dancing, doing anything, and we can get a sense what is the frame compared to what is core to individual’s character. Conversely, we learn of character by through participation in the frame. When I was interviewing and recruiting for an exclusive social organization, the leaders made clear that it was necessary to interact with and observe individuals in a variety of frames in order to be able make an informed judgment about the character of the potential members.

Throughout the paper we will see the near inseparability of frames and characters. Fauconnier and Turner write, “some characters seem to be attached to their frames. Odysseus builds a place for himself inside many different kinds of frames, but Sherlock Holmes brings his detective frame with him and causes a frame-blend just by appearing: If Sherlock Holmes comes to your dinner party, someone is going to get killed” (ibid). James Bond is another larger-than-life character, one who is able to transcend his situation. Others like the deux amis we will see later on are completely subjugated to the frames in which they participate.

We use proper names (PNs) like James Bond to refer to specific people; we will see

---

10 Whether they are willing or unwilling participants in that frame.
11 We can also think of this in terms of Schank and Abelson’s Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding.
that PNs in use rely upon frame metonymy to access specific aspects of the multitudes of meaning associated with the name.

The next section is an opening to personal identity. It shares a passage from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, and outlines the interpretations that will follow.

**Personal Identity and Character**

‘Who are YOU?’ said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I--I hardly know, sir, just at present--at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.’
‘What do you mean by that?’ said the Caterpillar sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’
‘I can’t explain MYSELF, I’m afraid, sir’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’
‘I don’t see,’ said the Caterpillar.
‘I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,’ Alice replied very politely, ‘for I can’t understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.’
‘It isn’t,’ said the Caterpillar.
‘Well, perhaps you haven’t found it so yet,’ said Alice; ‘but when you have to turn into a chrysalis--you will some day, you know--and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you’ll feel it a little queer, won’t you?’
‘Not a bit,’ said the Caterpillar.
‘Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,’ said Alice; ‘all I know is, it would feel very queer to ME.’
(Carroll, ch. 5)

The passage, above, contains a rich dialogue with examples illustrating the characters’ construal of character. The concept of a person is complicated; the notion of self has developed over time through a variety of cultural inputs\(^{12}\). The dialogue between Alice and the Caterpillar mentions two important aspects of character: self over time and another as one’s self (or one’s self as an other).

---
\(^{12}\) See Mauss
In the next section we will see how names are used for reference, and, as has already been mentioned, how names are entangled with frames.

**Names and Reference**

Persons tend to have names, and PN are highly relevant to numerical identity. Names are one of the most efficient and stable ways to refer to individuals\(^\text{13}\). PN further aid us to refer to an individual, which can also serve to differentiate one individual from another\(^\text{14}\). Barbara Dancygier tells us that the meaning PN relies upon frame metonymy. Holger Steen Sørensen says, “Proper Names are [signs] with distinctive features” (107). Also, Kripke writes “what we really associate with a [proper] name is a family of descriptions” (31). While the PN helps to designate a numerically unique individual, the ‘family of descriptions’ associated with it are the many aspects of that proper name’s qualitative identity\(^\text{15}\); names therefore wind up referring to both types of identity. We can thus consider PN to be special concepts. Use of frame metonymy and constructional blends allow us to use a PN in a variety of circumstances to refer to the individual\(^\text{16}\) or aspect(s) of character. PN are not only for persons in the most general sense. Places, domesticated animals, vehicles, works of art including immaterial objects such as

---

\(^{13}\) Naming with respect to reference has been discussed throughout philosophy, some names of persons having done so include: Frege, Kripke, Mill, Russell, and Strawson.

\(^{14}\) Two or more people may share the same full name. This is increasingly salient through technologies like facebook – I have trouble locating the Robert Williams with whom I’d like to be friends – context clues like being a friend with a friend are helpful, as would be a picture. There is also much to say about digital representations of individuals, fake accounts on such social media platforms and beyond. Such a discussion is well beyond the scope of this work.

\(^{15}\) These qualities are not always spelled out, and often are under-specified in texts as well as inferred through context (at times, incorrectly).

\(^{16}\) Especially things directly related to that body
symphonies and poems (by the ‘titles’ of such works) are labeled with PNs. Those non-person objects are given clearer numerical identifiers through the PN; additionally the application of a PN to non-persons inversely assigns intentionality to them.

Kripke tells us that PNs are “modally rigid – would have the same reference when we use them to speak of counterfactual situations as they do when used to describe the actual world” (131). Fauconnier and Turner give the counterfactual example “In France, Watergate would not have hurt Nixon” (225). Here we have three main parts to consider, France, Watergate, and Nixon. Each can serve as metonyms for larger structures, though Nixon will be the focus here. While Nixon can be used in any number of ways, each potentially picking at different aspects of his qualitative identity, it is his relation to Watergate, a scandal frame, which is highlighted in the counterfactual given. The numerically unique Nixon can be evoked in a multitude of scenarios. Some of those situations may not exist, may be entirely unreal, fictional, or impossible. To take another president we know, Bill Clinton could never have interacted with Cleopatra, though we have no problem imagining how that exchange may play out.

The name of an actor and the name of a character may point to the same physical body with respect to a given context. For example, the actors in a production of Hamlet have at least dual identities while on stage. (1) That of their

---

17 Nixon here is the idealized sense of him, the compression of the many instances of which we know of him.
18 Kripke refers to these scenarios as ‘Possible Worlds’
19 Conceptual Integration is at the heart of how we perform such imaginative feats (see Fauconnier and Turner).
true self and (2) that of embodying the character they are enacting. Among the countless productions of *Hamlet* over the years, the famous actors (just a partial list) Kenneth Branagh, Richard Burton, Mel Gibson, and Sir Laurence Olivier have been Hamlet on stage. It would be just as easy to laugh, recalling to someone not present at the performance that ‘Hamlet tripped on his shoelaces on stage’, or to say ‘David Tennant tripped on his shoelaces on stage’. When choosing to say either sentence, we could be describing the same action, involving the same body, shoes and shoelaces, and the same stage, referring to the same moment in time, but would be foregrounding a certain self or character, that being either Hamlet (the character) or David Tennant (the body or person). These examples point out some of the complexities we face when naming or referring to a character. It comes down to which frame in which we find ourselves participating or viewing, furthermore the aspects we hope to highlight through our purposeful communication of such an event.

As we've seen, names have a persistent structure over time – Hamlet has existed since Shakespeare first wrote about him – and this is a major aspect of character. In the dialogue between Alice and the caterpillar, Alice shared how she was confused about being so many different sizes or otherwise how she had changed (in her view, so much) over the course of the day. The next section will give us more insight into how character develops, or is modified, over time.

**Character over time**

---

20 It could be further argued that David Tennant is a character like Hamlet, but we will stay away from that for the time being.
Our constitution (cellular) changes moment by moment. Our actions also dictate or change how others (or we) may characterize our selves. Some events cause seemingly great change even over a small amount of time, for example buzzing my hair, a car accident, or the news of the loss of a loved one. With respect to the distinction between qualitative and numerical identity, we are anew in each moment. Thus, what was referred to as me becomes a new unique concept the next moment, though with many qualitative links to the prior self. Derek Parfit suggests one solution for how to think about personal identity, namely through physical and/or psychological continuity. This view helps us work with a coherent sense of personal identity that avoids some of the pitfalls around the traditional identity debate. The complete character of a person (highly related to their qualitative personal identity) is developed over time; it is a persistent compression of the collection of behaviors, thoughts, moments of that person. Reinforcement and/or repetition of specific behaviors and thoughts help reinforce a persons’ intrinsic character. They have an internal sense of ‘who’ they are, this I term one’s ‘internal identity’. Each external observer may also have a different sense of that

---

21 The moment-by-moment change is known, in some circles, as four-dimensionalism. This has to do with the three dimensions of space with the fourth dimension being time (see Sider).

22 It should be made clear that when speaking about personal identity, I mean the qualities associated with an individual. In the general case this has to do with the association of a body, as well as the individuals’ character. Naturally, fictional creations do not necessarily have a body, but this is where the psychological rather than physical continuity is especially relevant.

23 The Ship of Theseus and similar puzzles have been discussed perhaps since identity has been first discussed. Such puzzles do not necessarily help to solve the problems, but are useful as individuals’ stances on such problems do illustrate their perspectives and how they wish to use the vocabulary.

persons’ character, thus there are many ‘external identities’ associated with a person. Psychologists and therapists often help people with identity crises, changing who they see themselves as, or coming to terms and accepting what that is. They are in the business of addressing their patients’ internal identities. Con-artists are a prime bunch for really attempting to shape their associated external identities, as are actors. Differentiating internal and external identity (sense of self and sense of other) are necessary prerequisites for folk psychology.

In the first part of the text above, Alice is distinguishing moments of her prior self based on major changes she's seen in her self. Specifically, in the story, this has been through different changes in physical size. She has been her normal size, quite large, and quite small. Alice has seen her self (body) as being different sizes, of changing in these ways. If her size were a central feature to who she considers

25 Besides the fact that con-artists often hold multiple identities, the point I attempt to make is the conscious effort to adjust behaviors, actions, appearance. Life coaches will stress this too, suggesting things like “project confidence”. Any conscious effort to project something to another is an effort to shape external identity.

26 It is a major developmental milestone to understand the boundaries between self and other. Purposeful driven action is key. See Noë for a discussion of action and perception. See Held and Hein for experimental evidence of self-driven action shaping understanding of environment.

27 Folk-Psychology is meant mean how we understand the mental states of others, like attributing beliefs and desires.

28 I wish to use the colloquial notion of normal here and avoid an overly technical definition. Something like what Alice would expect of herself, as would most outsiders without the introduction of some large element of change. Normal in a more technical sense has to do with a prototypical sense of that being, character, or person, and as deictically grounded. Later in the paper there will be more on this.

29 There is more to changing a person than the physical. Any change makes it easy to consider oneself as different, especially the closer those attributes are to a given sense of who or where we are.

30 It is that Alice’s mind has perceived, or phenomenologically experienced, her body being different sizes.
herself to be she would more readily believe that she has changed a number of
times. As we can see from her speaking, speaking with the Caterpillar: “I can’t
explain MYSELF, I’m afraid, sir’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see”, Alice is
having an identity crisis. She is having a hard time reconciling her concept of self
with her body and her sense of I. Later in her discussion she says how she is
confused.

We just saw how Alice has trouble with the changes in aspects of her
qualitative identity. The other side to that coin is the persistence and reinforcement
of fundamental attributes. We will be looking to both James Bond and Hamlet for
examples of how reinforcement of traits facilitates attribution of essential aspects of
character.

James Bond, an instantly recognizable character, is instantiated (by Ian
Fleming who wrote the initial novels and helped with screenplays for some of the
early films) both in writing and in the films that feature his character. He is an
undeniably iconic figure with a classic style and catchphrase: ‘shaken, not stirred.
Bond’s choice of drink has even become closely associated with who he is. Before
the most recent Bond movie, Skyfall, Heineken paid to have Bond drink their
product and for the use of his image and trademark in advertisements. To some,

31 People hold different aspects of themselves to be more central. It is in this line
that we can see that there is not a clear universal hierarchy of what constitutes a
person, but rather is individually determined and context dependent
32 Seemingly multiple times in each movie, Bond orders a drink this way. He
actually does deviate from this, sometimes ordering, for instance, a Mojito, but the
sheer repetition means we compress this into being part of the essence of Bond. We
may value other traits, and place those as essentially someone, that is a result of
emotionally resonating or of being of high salience and importance that a single
instance is enough for this attribution. These are two different ways of arriving at
essential character.
including former Bond actor George Lazenby, this product placement breaks with tradition and changes the character’s image. Despite these singular qualities, the character James Bond has been, like Hamlet, enacted by a succession of different actors. The case with James Bond, largely, though, has been a continuation of the same character over a series of different stories, so he develops as a person with more and more extensions to the richness of scenarios in which we get to know him.

There are currently twenty-three official Bond films, as produced by Eon and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and these have been a rather complete storyline, though acted by a series of six different actors. Bond transcends authorial/narrator creation; Ian Fleming created 007 and wrote the first fourteen novels, but the number of works considered James Bond novels now exceeds double Fleming’s initial contribution. Several different authors have penned Bond stories, but really, the character of Bond lives as penned by different authors and as enacted by different bodies. Regardless, we have no problem minding James Bond as a coherent ideal and character. In this way, we could say that James Bond has a life of his own.

Another example comes from a lesser-known work, Tom Stoppard’s ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,’ which gives the audience a different perspective on the events happening around Shakespeare’s Hamlet. It centers on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and is largely the story of what happens off stage of a ‘traditional’ Hamlet performance. After more than 30 years of staging productions

---

33 There have been other product placements in the history of bond movies, but they were more bond-like. Bond drinking a common lager (though having a label marked Premium) seems problematic.
of ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,’ a director realized the benefits of actors embodying the same character in different productions. “In 2001 ... both shows were directed, designed, and rehearsed together to make the most out of the shared scenes and situations” (Warren). The American Shakespeare Company also put on both performances with “the same actors in the same roles” in 1995 and 2009 (ibid). For example, the same person who played Ophelia in Hamlet also played Ophelia in ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.’ Hamlet and ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead’ are two different works by two different authors. While Shakespeare originally created the characters in Hamlet, these characters are the same in ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,’ even though different actors may embody them.34

While actors in films and the theater are some of the clearest examples of the theatricality of performance, the American Sociologist, Erving Goffman, writes, in his Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, about how everyone performs and theatricality is not confined to staged performances. When getting to know a potential mate people are often on their best behavior. Unbecoming behavior may not come until later in the relationship. We can imagine a woman saying, “You’re not the man I married”. While one context might involve the lights out and mistakenly finding out she has bed the ‘wrong’ man, I mean this utterance to occur in a context where she is speaking to the man with whom she walked down the aisle. The man that he is now is no longer qualitatively identical to the man that she married; she is aiming to highlight a dis-analogy with absent features that were once present. The man still

34 The co-production (and co-acting) of these two plays seems to be a rare occurrence.
maintains a psychological and physical continuity here\textsuperscript{35}, but is missing some attribute that was present before (such as attentiveness). The husband being ‘not the man she married’ is similar to the Alice’s ‘I’m not myself you see’. There is the persistence of the core character of that person\textsuperscript{36}.

The next section shows how we can switch places, putting ourselves in other situations and specifically, for the moment, in a frame in which our conversation partner is or will be.

**One’s self as another**

Alice talks about how she thinks the caterpillar will feel with respect to the transformation he will likely make later in life. In the passage Alice is suggesting what amounts to the canonical ‘If I were you . . .’\textsuperscript{37}. The caterpillar does not think it will feel it a little queer to change from a caterpillar to a chrysalis and eventually to a butterfly. Alice thinks that if she were in the caterpillar’s shoes, so to say, she would understand how that might feel, and that it would feel queer to her. Thomas Nagel, who writes on what it would be like to be a bat, has addressed the question of whether a conscious being can understand another. We can ask whether Alice would get what it would be like to be a caterpillar -- Alice and the caterpillar wind up disagreeing over the queerness of changing states, she says “all I

\textsuperscript{35} If not too much time has passed it is possible that the man still has the same passport. The legal notions of personhood are related to though not the same as the conceptual.

\textsuperscript{36} What constitutes core character can differ by person. My friend Mark may think my core character as being fundamentally one way, while my friend Brian may even believe the opposite. This is related to but still distinct from holding multiple personalities, currently diagnosed as Disassociated Identity Disorder; such a discussion is well beyond the current scope.

\textsuperscript{37} See pages 255-258 of Fauconnier and Turner.
know is, it would feel very queer to ME”. Alice seems to have no problem integrating herself into what it would be like. It is just a partial mapping, of what Alice thinks to be relevant, and what the process would be like. In this specific example, Alice analogically puts herself into what would be the experience of someone going through what the caterpillar will presumably go through. Alice is able to maintain what she thinks to be her centered viewpoint (of her me) over time.

Turner writes, “Narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought”. Though the instrument is not finely tuned at the start of life. Gallagher questions whether passing false-belief tasks – ones that traditionally are assumed to demonstrate Theory of Mind -- are really valid or if they instead demonstrate advancing narrative abilities. Bloom additionally gives us reasons to question the False Belief tasks. A recent paper by Tobin and Israel discusses irony as a viewpoint phenomenon; comprehending irony demonstrates the ability to maintain different viewpoints for the participants of a narrative. Developmental literature can be seen in agreement38. As we develop we are able to recognize, maintain and adopt different and distinct viewpoints.

Attempting to understand others, and imagining what it would be like to be them is at the heart of Folk Psychology, and that is what is covered in the next section.

Folk Psychology

38 Wilson writes, “This fits with the consensus in the developmental literature that irony comprehension develops considerably later than metaphor comprehension -- typically, between the ages of five and six, when the ability to pass standard second-order false belief tasks has just emerged.” These data (and articles it cites) can be read as support Gallagher’s proposal.
Many of us think that we can understand others, and that we are maximally rational human beings. Neither is very true. Recent work in Behavioral Economics and Decision Making has shown how we are ‘Predictably Irrational’ and don’t make the best decisions even if having all the data. According to McCubbins, Turner and Weller, “Human beings for tens of thousands of years have been adept at moving through different settings and roles, exactly because they can adjust their demeanor, preferences, beliefs, and actions to suit their situations. Relative to all other species, they can turn on a dime, and this has made them astonishingly successful at inhabiting and constructing different forms of life”. Currently, it is not that humans lack a functional awareness; we just do not always have the greatest models for how our minds work.

Daniel Hutto writes about narrative and folk-psychology. For instance:

By means of robust examples folk psychological story-telling gives insight into the behavior of core propositional attitudes in situ – how they normally relate with respect to one another and other psychological players, i.e. emotions, perceptions, etc. And this ‘mental set’ is placed in a still wider context in such stories. They also introduce a range of stock characters and personality types, set scripts for behavior in specific situations and familiar plot-lines. All of this prepares children for making sense of actions in terms of reasons although this goes mostly unnoticed, unmentioned, both during the activity itself and in most philosophical reflections on it. (235)

It is in this light we can see the importance of narrative for everyday understanding of the world. While much thought may go into analyzing some aspects, others are seemingly automatic or thoughtless. The seemingly thoughtless aspects of understanding others was written by Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments,

39 This is the title of a book by Dan Ariely. Much work has been done by him and many others.
That this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels, may be demonstrated by many obvious observations, if it should not be thought sufficiently evident of itself. When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation. Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner. The very force of this conception is sufficient, in their feeble frames, to produce that itching or uneasy sensation complained of. Men of the most robust make, observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate, than any other part of the body is in the weakest.

To many folk-psychology is akin to empathy, though some prefer a more narrow definition of the latter. In order to empathize we must identify with the other. Often we hear about putting ourselves in another’s shoes, but even if we would never wear Nike there are other ways we can empathize. It comes down to qualitative identity, I need not have the same shoes as the other, but maybe we are both wearing green, or are students, or are bird-lovers or one of many other properties, at least. We must be able to cast ourselves to the same category as another having similar qualities. Patrick Colm Hogan tells us “not all empathy is the same. In every case, empathy is based on some sort of similarity. After all, to
empathize with someone is to put oneself in his/her place, and that substitution presupposes something that is shared” (140). Similar qualities or attributes; in other words, the two things are qualitatively identical with each other with respect to a number of aspects. Recognizing similar qualities, for example categorizing another as part of the same group as ones’ self, affects cooperation and helpfulness. Later in the paper we will see specific examples.

The next section will share ways we come to learn about characters.

**Learning about Characters**

When speaking of the identity of characters, we need to look back to the distinction between internal and external identities. A given character will only have one internal identity, their internal representation of who they are, that is, their properties, or the many parts that make up their qualitative identity. An external identity, on the other hand, is an outsiders’ counterpart to this. In other words, a character can have many external identities, one that corresponds to each holder of representation. For example, it could be possible that I would maintain external identities for each person I have interacted with, as well as many who I have only seen or heard about.

We can come to know of an individual – that is the external identity that we hold for who we think them to be - in theater, in literature, or in life through three different ways. (1) Learning about a character or individual from themselves through dialogue, monologue, or action – otherwise, a purposeful disclosure to the audience. (2) Learning about a character from another character while the character we are learning about is present. (E.g. someone describing them in a
certain way, while they take no issue\(^{40}\).) (3) Learning about a character or individual who is absent from the present. It is often that we are learning about a past action, though we may learn about intentions for the future.

For an example of (1):

HAMLET

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month--
Let me not think on't--Frailty, thy name is woman!--
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears:--why she, even she--
O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd longer--married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month:
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

(Act 1 Scene 2. Lines 129 – 159)

\(^{40}\) With further information we may determine what we think we are learning is not the case, or, in other words, that the description we are hearing or what we witness is for some other strategic purpose. Additionally, if the character
Here we see Hamlet, in a monologue, sharing how he feels about his father’s death and his mother remarrying his uncle in what he perceives to be a short amount of time. We are given access to Hamlet’s internal identity, as well as his external identity of Gertrude. We also enhance or modify, through this semi-privileged information, our external identity of Hamlet.

The following is an example of (2):

KING CLAUDIUS
   How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET
   Not so, my lord; I am too much i’ the sun.

QUEEN GERTRUDE
   Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
   And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
   Do not for ever with thy vailèd lids
   Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
   Thou know’st ’tis common; all that lives must die,
   Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET
   Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN
   If it be,
   Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET
   Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not "seems."
   ’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
   Nor customary suits of solemn black,
   Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
   No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
   Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
   Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
   That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,
   For they are actions that a man might play:
   But I have that within which passeth show;
   These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, To give these mourning duties to your father: But, you must know, your father lost a father; That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound In filial obligation for some term To do obsequious sorrow: but to persevere In obstinate conolement is a course Of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief; It shows a will most incorrect to heaven, A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, An understanding simple and unschool'd: For what we know must be and is as common As any the most vulgar thing to sense, Why should we in our peevish opposition Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven, A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, To reason most absurd: whose common theme Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried, From the first corse till he that died to-day, 'This must be so.' We pray you, throw to earth This unprevailing woe, and think of us As of a father: for let the world take note, You are the most immediate to our throne; And with no less nobility of love Than that which dearest father bears his son, Do I impart toward you. For your intent In going back to school in Wittenberg, It is most retrograde to our desire: And we beseech you, bend you to remain Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye, Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son. (Act 1 Scene 2, lines 66 -117)

In the above example, we are given part of Claudius’ external identity of Hamlet, which helps us shape our own. Through this sharing we are also able to shape who we believe Claudius to be.

The main and worthwhile point of discussion here is a detailed description of Hamlet’s actions off stage, through a dialogue between Ophelia and Polonius (Act 2 Scene 1):
Polonius: How now, Ophelia, what’s the matter?

Ophelia: O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrightened!

Polonius: With what, I’ the’ name of God?

Ophelia: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stocking fouled,
Ungarter’d, and down-gyvèd to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport,

As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors — he comes before me

Polonius: Mad for thy love?

Ophelia: My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.

Polonius: What said he?

Ophelia: He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his orm,
And with his other hand thus o’er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As ‘a would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,

And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned,

He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o’ doors he went without their helps,
And to the last bended their light on me

(Lines 71-97)

Simply put, we receive a jarring account of how Hamlet, with clothes undone and falling off, visits Ophelia’s room. This includes building up to that point. Since there is a linear timeline, at least in how stories are presented, we can trace back what would be considered prior knowledge. The dialogue varies between two time
frames and helps us develop and modify a number of identities. We are both witnessing a present conversation between Polonius and Ophelia and also taken to a time where Ophelia interacts with Hamlet. It is in this light we are able to see how stories bridge the gap between writing, speaking, living and the theater. Even though the actions, like Hamlet taking her by the wrist, take place off stage, they are still brought to life within us. Rich vivid imagery is brought to life. We’d imagine Ophelia instantiating her experience, as well as to Polonius, who hears the story for the first time. We, as audience, are a step removed, though have no trouble seeing what Hamlet did. This embedding of stories is commonplace throughout literature and our daily lives. We are impoverished with the facts when we are just presented with a text or voice, though the voice will do more justice, as it can be further descriptive than just a text. The actual visual prompt from experience allows us to see the exact manner of motion and expressions. When we are not given them, we can experience things just as vividly, but that comes from how we go about creating this in our minds.

Time can be non-linear in stories, which increases the complexity. We can jump around to the current moment, the past, what the future may hold, in the stories narrative, while also maintaining that in relation to and distinct from our personal time. This dialogue also takes us back to a prior point in time. We are both in the present, a part of the exchange between Ophelia and Polonius, and told of the incident between Ophelia and Hamlet, so a part of the story within the larger story.

---

41 This, in some ways, is contingent on the fact that we find Ophelia to be a reliable narrator.
Lines 71 – 73 take place in the present, and line 74 begins to setup the space where she can then narrate in the present tense, or otherwise mentally time travel (and bring us with her) to the event she wishes to discuss. On line 80 Ophelia gets away from the present narration when using ‘as if he had been loosed out of hell’. She returns to the present in the second half of line 81 with ‘he comes before me.’ She then leaves the past space and resumes the present moment in her dialogue with Polonius, and has no need to rebuild the past space, when retelling what happened by answering Polonius’ question beginning on line 84. After line 97, the interaction between her and Hamlet, which is not included here, is only in the past tense. They have resumed being in the present. Through this dialogue, we are transported across times, but also modify many identities. Surely, Hamlet is the subject of discussion, so even in his absence from the stage he is still brought to life through dialogue and we gain a fuller understanding of him. Thus, our external identities of him are richer. Polonius’ external identity of Hamlet becomes richer, as does Ophelia’s of Polonius through their interaction. The audience also gains insight into the relationship between Ophelia and Polonius, as well as how each of them speaks about Hamlet and each other, at least within that context. For such a short exchange, we are able to learn much; this has to do with our agility at understanding stories, a routine behavior in everyday life.

In the next section we will discuss determination of frames in relation to character, and potential real world consequences.

**Placing Character**
As discussed earlier, Fauconnier and Turner note that frames play a role in
the construing character (249-67). The frame and the identities of the
characters/people involved go hand in hand and often help shape one another. For
example, in his short story, Deux Amis, Guy de Maupassant gives us insight into
different frames at play when interpreting who others are, their roles, and what
they may be doing. This is a story that takes place in Paris during the Franco-
Prussian War. It involves two old friends who meet up and get the permission of a
French officer to leave the city limits to go fishing. Ahead of time, they discuss the
possibility of meeting German soldiers:

- Morisset balbutia : "Hein ! si nous allions en rencontrer ?"
- *Morissoet stammers, “What if we run into them?”*
- M. Sauvage répondit, avec cette gouaillerie Parisienne reparaissant malgré
tout : "Nous leur offririons une friture."
- *Sauvage responds with Parisian lightheartedness, despite everything, "We’d
offer them some fish".*

Later in the story a Prussian officer captures the two friends:

- "Pour moi, vous êtes deux espions envoyés pour me guetter. Je vous prends
et je vous fusille. Vous faisiez semblant de pêcher, afin de mieux dissimuler
vos projets. Vous êtes tombés entre mes mains, tant pis pour vous ; c’est la
guerre.
- *To me, you are two spies sent to watch me. I capture you and shoot you. You
pretend to fish in order to conceal your plan. You have fallen into my hands,
too bad for you; it is war.*
(Maupassant, and an original translation).

The two fishermen do not take into account the deadly seriousness of the war frame in which the Prussian officer is living by. It is too much for him to take another perspective. For him to do so would be dangerous to him and his troops. Although the fishermen were not posing any actual threat, the priming of the war is ultimately what shaped the interpretation of how the Prussians saw the Frenchmen. In this story, the two friends were unfortunately at the mercy of the army. It is quite fitting, considering Todd Oakley’s remarks: “At the end of any social ontology there are men with guns”. The two friends were aware of the risk, but took it anyways.

Ultimately, frame determination has to do with what associations we maintain including both our longer term and engrained views as well as with what we are proximally primed. The Prussian general viewing the world through his war frame is perhaps unsurprising, since it is what he lives day in and day out. More localized and temporally sensitive, the clothes you wear and the symbolic power attached, affects how you perform on tasks. In one study participants were given a white coat to wear. If they believed it was a lab coat, participants did better on attention tasks, compared to when they believed the coat to be for a painter. It is in this light we see the heavy symbolic nature of our online cognitive processes that help place us in our bodies, in time, in frames and in clothes. If attention processes are affected it is likely that how we would see and identify others would also be.

Our perceived similarity to others affects our willingness to help them. When primed for their affinity for their primary team, Manchester United soccer fans are by far more likely to assist a runner who slips, screams, grabs his ankle and is
wearing a Manchester United T-Shirt, thus showing his in-group status as compared to a similar runner without the Manchester United shirt (Levine). If a more inclusive prime is used, that of being a soccer fan, the high rate of assistance even goes to runners that are wearing Liverpool FC shirts. Liverpool has traditionally been the rival of Manchester United. The perceived rareness of one’s similarity to another increases likeliness to be caring, that is, to offer help.42 So, smaller groups would seem to have a greater group coherence and likelihood to identify with one another, at least on those aspects of their qualitative identities.

**Conclusion**

The overview presented in this paper does not cover all of the constituents of character. It is clear that character is a complex concept of which is necessary for navigating the world. Our folk-psychological notions help us cooperate, interpret and succeed (or fail) in our relations with others; it is a fundamental ability, though not an innate one. Understanding and recognizing character may have life and death consequences, or just consequences of varying convenience. Throughout this paper many of the intertwining constituents should have been weaved together to help make the whole of what constitutes character clear.

---

42 This was a study by Jerry M. Burger and others; the study manipulated a variable of a make-believe fingerprint types, and informing subjects the supposed corresponding amount of match with the general public.
REFERENCES:


Maupassant, Guy de. *Deux Amis*. Online at:  
http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/courses/mjwest/French_Graduate_Reading/Deux%20amis.htm

Mauss, Marcel. A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self. [W.D. Halls Trans.]. In M. Carrithers, S. Collins, & S. Lukes (Eds.), *The category of the person*. 1-25. Cambridge. (1985).


