

Summary

Narrative identity as the empirical subjectivity – MacIntyre, Taylor, Ricoeur

The notion of narrative identity appeared in the philosophical discourse at the beginning of the 80s of the twentieth century, when Alasdair MacIntyre in his famous work, *After Virtue*, proposed considering the life of an individual within the categories of a biographical tale. This conception was then developed by Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor, and after them also by such thinkers as Daniel Dennett, Marya Schechtman or David DeGrazia. The present book concerns the problem of narrative identity. I understand it as a contemporary form of subjectivity, which has its origins in the former, Cartesian-Kantian philosophy, but at the same time is, as Alain Renaut put it in *The Era of the Individual*, a sort of a discontinuity and a break of the monistic tendency in development of a modern subject. Here the substantial unity of the self of classical conceptions is replaced by the unity of a narrative form and somebody's own autobiographical tale. I demonstrate that such defined self which includes individual, pluralistic, narrative and aesthetical elements skipped in earlier, rationalistic and universalistic theories, as well as such features as time, processuality or particular social and historical conditions is a sort of a weakened, depotentialized subjectivity (according to the terminology used by, for example, Wolfgang Iser and Odo Marquard in the works devoted to Kant, and the so-called turn to the aesthetics in his philosophy). This subject does not fulfil the criteria of the so-called strong, absolute rationality of the Hegelian type and can achieve self-understanding only in the indirect way of a tale to which it is reduced, but is still able to act and to make decisions.

The work is divided into two main parts preceded by a large chapter in which I discuss the problem of a narrative turn in the humanities which took place in the second half of the 20th century, and thanks to which the notion of narrative, earlier associated mainly with literary fiction, has become a part of the scientific discourse in many branches of the humanities, including philosophy. At the very beginning of this chapter, I discuss the problem of the positivist methodology and its role in such disciplines as history or the social sciences in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. In this period, cognitive functionalism, represented by such scientists as Talcott Parsons or Bronisław Malinowski, played a main role in the social sciences. The scholars believed that human reality can be explained within the frames of notions and general laws similar to those applied by physicists and biologists. In the middle of the 20th century, the thinkers from Parsons school, for example Clifford Geertz, gave up the questions about social structure or social organization, which were in the centre of interest of functionalist research, and began to investigate the system of culture as such. In this way, they invented cultural anthropology. Thanks to Geertz, who was looking for inspiration in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy and who treated culture as a text or utterance and an ethnographer as a person who interprets cultural rituals, narrative methodology finally appeared in cultural anthropology and in the social sciences.

In the first chapter, I also discuss the role of narratology in literature and history. I show how the narrative turn in the humanities was taking its course referring to such theories as Roland Barthes's structural analysis of narrative, the French Annales School, Arthur C. Danto's conception of the so-called narrative sentence, or Franklin R. Ankersmit's narrative logic, and to the views of such thinkers as Hayden White, David Carr, Louis O. Mink, or Paul Veyne. Their analysis of narrative and of the historical discourse made it possible to revalue a positivist notion of truth, according to which sentences and statements are scientific only when they are empirically verifiable, and in such a way they contributed to the success of narrative methodology in the contemporary humanities.

In the next chapter, I discuss four selected conceptions, that is to say, Cartesian, Hegelian, Kantian and Schellingian, representing classical, modern, and rationalistic models of subjectivity in the presence of which and with a reference to which the notion of narrative identity was shaped. I show how an idea of a substantial self, separated from the external reality, appears in Cartesian thought and becomes an important subject of philosophical reflection. Then I present how this thinking and including a volitional element Cartesian ego cogito in Hegelian thought transforms itself in

the absolute self, in which freedom is identified with necessity, and which has a processual character as it is shaped through the history of the world, which is one and the same thing with it. I discuss a difference between an intelligible self, i.e., the subject as it is in itself and an empirical self, i.e., the subject as it appears in time, space and causality in Kant's transcendental philosophy. Referring to P. F. Strawson's analysis of *The Critique of a Pure Reason*, I underline Hume's empirical inspirations of Kantian critical thought. I also briefly discuss Schellingian conception of subjectivity with its pluralism, aestheticism and narrativism.

In the last chapter, I discuss three main naturalistic conceptions of narrative identity created by Daniel Dennett, Marya Schechtman and David DeGrazia. Then I present hermeneutical theories of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur, which are key for my considerations. Both naturalistic and hermeneutical theories presume that our self should be considered through the lenses of the unity of the (auto)narrative which an individual can tell about him- or herself. However, in hermeneutical conceptions the subjective and rational character of such determined self is significantly more strongly stressed, as in all of them the personal story is shaped by a reference to the good defined within the frames of Aristotelian categories, which an individual should realize in his or her life and which gives an aim to all of his or her endeavours and deeds. In MacIntyre's philosophy (*After Virtue*) such good is a part of a role which an individual plays in a society, hence it is not an effect of a free choice, but is always to some extent imposed on us by tradition and common customs received by a given group. Taylor (*Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*) argued that an individual can choose it fully freely and the person fixes him- or herself who he or she wants to be, according to which scenario he or she will be playing and what his or her happiness consists in.

In Ricoeur's thought (*Time and Narrative, Oneself as Another*), personal narrative identity is derived from the identity of the literary character, hence it is shaped according to the rules of the so-called threefold mimesis. In this conception, which has the most systematic and strongly universal character, endeavour after good is not treated as a main criterion of coherence of personal narrative and is only one of the elements which are constitutive of our subjectivity, as the reference to Kantian ethics of a moral obligation is equally important. Keeping one's word and keeping one's promise is necessary to determine who we are. Moreover, becoming a genuine moral subject is not possible without a reference to the title "another" who is the same moral entity as we ourselves.

In the former chapter, I present narrative identity from the apriorical, that is to say theoretical and philosophical perspective. In the last part of my book, I present it from the aposteriorical point of view. I try to show why such type of subjectivity is interesting for various empirical sciences, such as the social sciences, psychology, ethnography, cultural anthropology, and so on. It is related to the fact that in contradistinction to classical, modern theories of the self, it has non-metaphysical and non-substantial character and is the sort of Kantian empirical self. In other words, it does not answer the question what our self is as such and who we are in a metaphysical sense of the term, but how we appear in time, space and causal relations, that is in successive events which compose our own life story. It takes into consideration those particular, social, cultural and historical elements which are not a part of universal conceptions of (individual) subjectivity of the strong, Hegelian type and which make us not only subjects but also individuals. I present similarities of such a conception with Hubert J. Hermans's dialogical self theory, with George Herbert Mead's notion of the so-called generalized other or with William James's distinction between "Me" and "I". Moreover, I prove that although this self includes empirical, particular, material and narrative features, it does not mean that it is really weak and is not able to be a true subject to act, make decisions and be responsible for actions and choices. The thesis mentioned above confirms particularly the following elements: a rational structure of our biographical narrative, a reference to the good or keeping oneself in a promise.