
While a "hermeneutics of narrative" can show us how people understand their world in complex, socially available, organized ways, and how as researchers we, too, actively construe as we try to understand other people, a "hermeneutics of action" is needed to overcome our addiction to the belief that knowing the world is our primary kind of engagement with it.

Interpreting Stories, Interpreting Lives: Narrative and Action in Moral Development Research

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Consider the following brief improvisatory narrative, told to a kindergarten teacher by a five-year-old named Ann, who is outraged that her peers are not granting her the turn she has requested in their play at jumping through a hoop: "You know what? I already asked first, um, and Laurie just came along and asked and then Kathryn said that Laurie's after her because I asked first."

Here is a recounting of one or more real events that do not logically presuppose or entail one another, with a continuant subject, constituting a whole, communicated by a narrator to a narratee (Prince, 1987, p. 58). But the sequencing of events is only one aspect of this narrative. The narrative points to a wrong-doing and grows out of a breakdown in practice that this wrong-doing constitutes. It is directed to a specific other in order to appeal for an intervention, the character of which is clear, though implicit. Furthermore, just prior to going over to the teacher with her narrative, Ann stomps her foot and announces to her peers, "Well I ASKED FIRST! I'm telling!"; it is evident that she knows that in "telling" her story she is adopting a confrontational moral stance. A reading of even this short a narrative gives us a sense of the moral terms in which she grasps events; but, in addition, when we place this episode within the larger whole from which it is drawn, we can articulate details of the practical project in which Ann is engaged, and the social order of which she partakes.

It is usually evident when speech (like Ann's account) and writing have a narrative organization and so need to be interpreted in a way that
is sensitive to the special characteristics of narrative. Human activity is less obviously in need of such treatment, but several lines of thought lead us to see that the activity also requires interpretation of a similar kind. In part this is because the narrative mode of explanation is an alternative to logical and causal explanations of action (what Bruner [1986, 1987] calls the paradigmatic mode). But while human activity is certainly an endless topic of narrative explication, this feature speaks only to the possibility of an interpretive approach to action.

This chapter explores reasons for thinking that the interpretation of action has a necessary part in our research, albeit one that is generally covered over. Narrative texts can be considered in terms of the characters and plot they portray, as schematic organizations providing cues to an actively engaged reader, or as situated discourse that has become enduring by virtue of being fixed in written form. Each of these facets provides fruit to a narrative approach to moral development research. Narratology and reader response theory are discussed first, and then the implications of viewing narrative as, first of all, a mode of action are considered. The argument is that the interpretation of narrative texts can show us how people understand their world in complex, socially available, organized ways, and how as researchers we, too, actively construe as we try to understand people's stories. But only by interpreting the role of narratives in ongoing everyday action can we overcome our virtual addiction to the belief that our primary kind of engagement with the world is knowing it. This leads to a discussion of Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology as an account of the way that interpretation and narrative have their roots in practical breakdowns and contradictions. Finally, in shifting the emphasis of our research toward the way narratives are situated in practice, we are led to a rethinking of moral development, particularly the end point of that development.

Narratives and Narratology

Narrative is the recounting of events; a narrative provides a way of coherently linking these events in time. The power of narrative to organize and explain has recently been praised by historians (for example, White, 1981), psychiatrists (for example, Spence, 1982), and moral philosophers (for example, Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988), while new species of narrative analysis in literary studies enjoy vogue status throughout the humanities. Philosophical analyses of narrative (for example, Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988) grant it, if possible, even greater power, as the unique place of a mimesis of life that is a necessary part of any attempt to understand ourselves and the world in which we live. Given this widespread surge of interest in narrative, it is no surprise that psychology, too, is witnessing an increasing appreciation of the role of narratives in human affairs, and the use of narrative methods for analysis of interviews and other textual materials (see Sarbin, 1986). For instance, Mishler (1986) has drawn our attention to the implications of the fact that interviews are not simple question-and-answer sequences whereby factual information is obtained from a research "subject" but instead are human interactions in social settings. As such, they produce discourse with narrative organization, structured to achieve particular concrete social ends (see Suchman and Jordan, 1990). Yet, these narratives have typically been edited out as irrelevant.

The most straightforward approach to the analysis of a narrative attends to its organization on the level of character and plot. Classical structuralist literary theory is of this type. Structuralist analyses distinguish between the two planes of story (content, or what is narrated) and discourse (expression, or the narrating). Story is typically analyzed in terms of elements such as actants and events (Greimas and Coureus, 1976), or roles and moves (Propp, 1968). Discourse, in turn, can be further differentiated into substance (medium) and form (the connected set of narrative statements). Discursival form is then considered in terms of such features as the chronologial order of presentation of events, point of view, pacing of action, and nature of any commentary by the narrator.

At this level of analysis, narrative is a distinctive mode of reporting one's experience of the world. Much can be learned by attending to the characters and the events of which narratives speak. Day's (this volume) description of the characters that inhabit the dramatic stage on which moral decisions are made demonstrates the value of such an analysis. Day takes his informants' reports on members of internal audiences such as the Incredible Hulk, a grandfather, and a close friend at face value, as veridical accounts of inner experience.

Such an analysis is often a useful exercise for sharpening one's understanding of what is going on in a narrative (which is why it forms the basis for the first of the four "listernings" or readings in Brown and Gilligan, this volume). What is missing from narratology, however, is any sense of the work of reading that every text requires. Narratology treats the elements of character and plot as though they have an autonomous existence. But these figures and events do not spring fully formed from the page; a little reflection shows that the reading of any text must, for instance, draw on what is not said as well as what is and so points up the importance of the text's appeal to the reader's expectations, to stylistic conventions, and to a tacit understanding of society and culture. This appeal is most evident when the text is a work of fiction, but it is equally true when we consider such texts as interview transcripts or transcripts of everyday conversation. The researcher plays an active role in interpreting this kind of material, too. How best can we identify and understand that activity, and its inevitable part in the research enterprise?

The school of literary theory in which the active role of the reader has
been most elucidated is reader response theory, also known as reception theory and reception aesthetics. This approach to the analysis of literary texts (and, by extension, to other material with a textual character) is a French and German development of Gadamer’s (1985) hermeneutics. The chief figures here are Wolfgang Iser (1976), Roman Ingarden (1973), Hans Jauss (1977, 1982), and Stanley Fish (1989). Unlike approaches built on the belief that a text can be studied in isolation, as an independent entity in its own right, reader response theorists maintain that it is essential to analyze as well the active role played by the reader, who is considered to be in a constitutive engagement with the text: making assumptions, drawing inferences, and constructing interpretations. The text is seen as providing a reader with a series of cues or instructions; it is made up of a sequence of schemata that provide general directions to a reader. Furthermore, any text provides only incomplete information; it is full of gaps that the reader must fill or bridge by drawing on knowledge of the world, and of literary conventions, that is not present in the text itself. This is one reason for the phenomenon of textual ambiguity; most texts can support alternative interpretations, and the reader must shift from one perspective to another, selecting and organizing, excluding some elements and foregrounding others, in order to build up the integrated interpretation that constitutes a “reading” of the text. This pluri-vocality also becomes apparent when texts are read in cultures and times different from those of their production. Jauss (1977, 1982), in particular, has emphasized the need to consider the horizon of both text and reader. Every text becomes newly situated in the cultural context that its reader occupies, a context determined by factors such as the reader’s gender, ethnicity, class, and age. At the same time, every text has an implied reader: its cues and codes reflect a sense of its likely audience.

An example of an approach to the study of moral development that is in concert with reader response theory is provided by the work of Lyn Mikel Brown, Carol Gilligan, and their colleagues (see Brown and Gilligan, this volume; also Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, and Argyris, 1989). These researchers emphasize the active character of reading or their analyses of interview narratives of real-life moral conflicts. Brown, Debold, Tappan, and Gilligan (1991, p. 27) describe their approach as both a reader response method and a feminist method: “Such a focus on the relationship between the reader’s and the narrator’s perspective directly challenges the strive toward ‘objectivity’—a disembodied voice and a detached point of view that characterizes traditional empiricist and rationalist approaches to psychological inquiry.”

Reader response theory, then, draws our attention, as researchers, to the active role we play in making sense of interview material. Reader and narrative are in a dynamic interplay that cannot be grasped by traditional views of the researcher as ideally detached and neutral, free from preconceptions and prejudices. On the contrary, preconceptions of a variety of kinds play an essential role in the comprehension of textual narratives. (Typically, in reader response theory, what the reader brings to the text is described as a matter of assumptions, expectations, and so on. But to describe the text in such cognitive terms is to neglect the ontological level of a reader’s involvement with the text, as discussed here shortly.) In research on moral development these preconceptions include assumptions about the distinguishing characteristics of “the moral,” its relationship to putatively nonmoral domains, the relations among cognitive, affective, and conative aspects of morality, and so forth (see Tappan, 1990). The extent to which such preconceptions can be explicitly chosen, and the degree to which they can be corrected in the course of research, are, needless to say, very complex questions (see Packer, 1989).

**Narrative as Representation, Narrative as Action**

The dynamic relationship between reader and text is only one of several relationships that the narrative text has with the circumstances of its production and of its consumption. These relationships, analyzed in detail by Ricoeur (1979), have their roots in the origins of written text in spoken discourse, which designates its speaker and hearer and makes reference to its location in space and time. Discourse designates its speaker by devices such as personal pronouns, and the meaning of its words expresses the speaker’s intention; it addresses a specific audience; it is located in time as a fleeting material event; and it refers ostensively to an actual situation common to the interlocutors. Thus, a written text is discourse that has been “fixed.” (“All writing is... a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning”, Gadamer, 1985, p. 354.) When discourse is fixed, as writing, its relations to speaker, audience, place, and time are not eliminated but modified. First, the text is no longer fleeting; this permanence is, after all, a primary purpose of writing. Second, the text’s tie to the author is distended and complicated: “The text’s career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author” (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 78). Third, the text refers now to a world of nonsituational references; it opens up a new way of seeing the world. And, finally, the text explodes the narrowness of the dialogical relation; it is now addressed to an audience that it creates.

What is the significance of Ricoeur’s (1979) analysis for the study of moral development? First, it highlights characteristics of the material we study that are largely taken for granted. When we interview our research participants, we unthinkingly capitalize on the traits of narrative text. When we include such transcripts in our published reports, we rely on the fact that these texts can be read by people who have known neither the events narrated nor the persons narrating them. Honey (1987, p. 80) argues
that the interview itself involves forms of fixing and distancing, such that it "is not a conversation in the usual sense of the word; rather, the interview is a spoken text." Whether or not one agrees with this contention, most interviews go through the additional step of being tape-recorded and transcribed and are certainly fixed by this process.

Second, consideration of what happens when speech is fixed as a text raises the question of the aim of a textual interpretation. When we interpret a narrative text about an everyday moral conflict, what are we trying to do? Ricoeur argues convincingly that textual interpretation can never be a return to the author's intention. The "problem of interpretation"—that is to say, the need for clarification that motivates interpretation in the first place—is not due to the impenetrability of the mental experience of the author, though that is indeed impenetrable. Rather, it is due to the "specific plurivocity" of all texts: the way they are open to several readings, each from a different perspective, because of the holistic construal that the reading involves, as parts are read in the light of a preliminary sense of the whole. When we interpret a narrative about moral conflict, then, we must avoid the psychologistic trap of trying to identify the narrator's subjective experience of events: the equivalent of the author's intention.

The third, and perhaps most important, way in which Ricoeur's analysis of the origins of text in discourse has significance for the study of moral development is that it suggests that we can move from conceiving of narratives solely as a mode of representation to considering them as, at the same time, a mode of action. Ricoeur's purpose in considering the traits of discourse that has been fixed as text is broader than simply to better understand texts; it is to reconsider questions about the objects and methodology of the social sciences. Action is the proper object, and interpretation the proper method, but "meaningful action is an object for science only under the conditions of a kind of objectification which is equivalent to the fixation of a discourse by writing. . . . This objectification is made possible by some inner traits of action. . . . which make doing a kind of utterance" (Ricoeur, 1979, pp. 80-81). By viewing action in this way, we have a means of overcoming the apparent "methodological paradox" of the human sciences, which, as Dilthey (1976) framed it, is that the explanation (Erklaren) of human life seems to require objectifications that make no appeal to understanding (Verstehen). Put briefly, a text is a kind of object, but one that still requires exegesis and interpretation. As such, it provides the space for a dialectical interplay of explanation and understanding. The "objectivity" of the text provides us with the basis for a new understanding of the human sciences, because this objectivity makes possible a kind of "explaining" that is not derived from the natural sciences.

So, while a hermeneutics of narrative texts can show us how people represent their world in complex, socially available, organized ways, and how as researchers we, too, actively construe as we try to understand other people, narrative also provides us with a route to the study of action. The study of action has been neglected in moral development research, and I maintain that a hermeneutics of action—undertaken through narratives and other modes of fixing—is needed to overcome our addiction to the belief that knowing the world is our primary kind of engagement with it.

Let me elaborate this claim with reference to the reader response method described above. Despite the strengths of their step away from the structuralist approach to moral development, Gilligan, Brown, and their colleagues have been, at least until recently, primarily interested, like Kohlberg, in the epistemic subject: They studied an interview transcript not simply as a description of a specific event or experience but also for the terms in which a person construes everyday moral conflicts. Specifically, Kohlberg (1981, 1984) aims at the rational reconstruction of a moral competence underlying the subject's reasoning about a moral dilemma; Gilligan (1982) aims to characterize the moral orientation by which a situation is understood, and by which a moral problem is constructed. In both cases what is sought is the framework within which events are organized, not a person's intentions and motives. The differences between these two approaches concern the underlying beliefs about the character of the framework: for Kohlberg it is a unitary system of unfolding stages of principles of justice; for Gilligan it is a gendered voice with which the vulnerable self may succeed or fail in aligning. Moreover, the voices of care and justice that Gilligan distinguishes are not subjective in the sense of being idiosyncratic, personal ways of construing the world; they are possible ways of structuring subjectivity that have been made available to all of us by our common culture.

The reader response approach has downplayed both the concrete events of the narrated story and the narrator's conduct in recounting that story, focusing instead on the "way" the story was told. The result has a lingering taste of structuralism: Care and justice were presented as transcendental frameworks within which the world is construed and events made sense of. If there was a danger here, it was that the voices were treated as ahistorical, acultural, natural, and inevitable, just as Kohlberg's stages often have been treated. (For the importance of locating the moral voices of justice and care in their sociocultural and historical context, see Tappan, 1991.) The focus was still epistemological, even though the epistemology was informed by considerations of engagement and by a sociopolitical stance (see Brown, 1986). Our attention, therefore, was still drawn to the narrator as the performer of the world rather than as agent in the world, as primarily active mentality, shaping representations of the world but not the world itself. What was missing, it seems, was a deeper appreciation of the way that the subject is always practically engaged, and of both the fact and character of this engagement.

The approach that Brown and Gilligan describe in this volume, how-
ever, moves much more clearly toward this latter kind of analysis. They write of the political character of their research questions and their research method, of the way that a “resisting listener” raises questions about power and authority in an androcentric society. As a result, Brown and Gilligan now show us that narratives do more than express the perspective of their narrator. First, the story telling itself is a response to being interviewed, which is a social event whose meaning and significance has been negotiated, explicitly or otherwise, by the parties involved. Second, the textual contradictions that Brown and Gilligan draw to our attention, and would have us read for, represent real existential conflicts, unresolved not only in the interview narrative but also, and more significantly, in the world. As Ricoeur (1979) puts it, the interview narrative points to a world by means of nonontensive reference, since the events narrated are of the past, but in so doing it also directs the reader’s attention to “boundary situations” that it typifies. Struggles with illegitimate authority, matters of life and death, these human situations are referred to by the text by virtue of its independence, what Ricoeur calls its “transcendence,” from the occasions of its production and the setting it purports to describe. For Brown and Gilligan, then, the situations of greatest significance are those of a young woman’s entry into our male-centered culture.

The text of an interview narrative can thus provide us with a new way of looking at things, through a movement from what is said to what is talked about. We can pay attention to the terms in which people frame events, the terms in which they are understood, but we can also consider the species of events talked about. What difference does this shift in attention make to the study of moral development? With interviews it entails paying more attention to how the narrator represents her own agency in the story and the consequences of her action (this is the kind of analysis addressed in Tappan, this volume). Since with interview material there is a problem of the “duality” of action (the “doing” of telling, and the “doing” told about), the shift also entails a move to action fixed not just in retrospective narratives but also in media such as video recordings (see Packer and Richardson, 1991). And it requires an analysis of the social ontology of human practice.

Hermeneutic Ontology

Heidegger (1962), like Ricoeur, was concerned with the kind of objectification that a human science requires. Heidegger’s striking move, central to his analysis, is one that changes the way we think about human existence, action, and knowledge. This move is to place understanding (Verstehen) on an ontological instead of an epistemological plane. Understanding, Heidegger proposed, is first and foremost an aspect of our being; to exist as human is to understand the world in which we are situated. We do not exist in the world as material entities and then, separately and subsequently, acquire knowledge of our surroundings; our existence is an understanding of the world. Our first preliminary indication that this is so comes from our recognition that we are the kind of beings whose beingness is an issue for us; human existence involves or entails an understanding of what it is to be human. From this preliminary inkling of the place of understanding in existence, Heidegger moved systematically to articulate the way our existence is always located in circumstances into which each of us finds we have been thrown, is always an active projecting of possibilities that arise from this situation, and is structured by a temporal stance, a way of unfolding and showing past, present, and future.

In this account understanding is, first and foremost, a way of grasping the entities around us in an active and engaged manner. Through this grasping we comprehend ourselves at the same time. Mostly, these entities, and the network of interrelationships among them, are transparent and invisible to us, but when practice breaks down, the entities and their interrelationships stand out as troublesome. At this point, in our practical deliberations on breakdown, we undertake interpretation, articulating aspects of our project, its objects, and its setting, in order to resume smooth practice (Packer, 1983). Interpretation is the articulation—the laying out and explication—of possibilities that have been projected and have become available in practical understanding.

In this account knowledge is always rooted in, and organized by, our practical engagement in the world. What might appear to be objective knowledge of independent objects’ properties, or of formal moral principles, is always, if Heidegger is correct, structured by concerned engagement in practical projects—in the most general analysis, by “care.” (Kuhn [1970], among others, is anticipated here; scientific knowledge always operates within a taken-for-granted network of practices, a paradigm, whose operation is transparent and so invisible until anomalies force themselves upon the practitioners of science, and so bring the paradigm to light.)

This account thus shows us the hidden kernel of truth, as well as the distortion, in cognitive accounts of the way preconceptions and assumptions (structures, schemes, scripts) organize our perception and understanding of new phenomena. It is true that we understand the new in terms of what we already know, but more broadly and completely we understand the new in terms of who we already are. The locus of operation of “pre-understanding” is therefore at the ontological not the epistemological level, at the level of who we are and what we do, not (or not first) what we know. (This is true of the reading of texts, too, hence the objection raised earlier to overly rational and cognitivist accounts of the reading process, even in hermeneutically informed reader response theory.)

This shift in emphasis in the way we construe knowing and acting has genuinely profound implications for the way we conceive of and study devel-
stood simply as a matter of the reflective knowledge a subject has of itself, as the subject considered only as an object of its own knowledge (see Blasi, 1984). The transformation of the subject involves reflective knowledge, but more primordially it involves the development of powers and inclinations that locate the subject in material relationship to other identities. Identity is a matter of finding a “place” for oneself in society.

Second, human development must mean a transformation of the social artifacts and institutions that call for our concern and engagement. Theories of the formation of the subject are generally far too straightforward, for they do not account for the way subjects transform social resources as they appropriate them. Also, the theories are too mysterious, insofar as the mechanisms of social influence—reinforcement, direct instruction, internalization—are appealed to rather than clearly spelled out. Heidegger’s account of human being includes, from the outset, reference to that being’s specificity and historicity, but also reference to its active character, constantly pressing forward or projecting into the future. Persons (or groups) take up possibilities from those that their culture and circumstances make available to them, but at the same time they transform these possibilities as they take them up. Only an impoverished psychology, surely, considers human development without reference to the products of human activity. Can Picasso’s development as an artist, let alone as a human, be considered by reference only to his theories or beliefs about painting, and not to the actual works of art that he created, considered as replies to the constraints and resources of his time and place?

Third, development entails change in the way that the world is grasped, as a reorganization of practice, not (or not first) of knowledge. Different concerns and new projects characterize children of different ages, and these projects and concerns are not the individual construction of an epistemic subject but instead are grounded in the culturally prescribed circumstances that children find themselves entering: family, forms of schooling, workplace, and so on. These constitute a ground from which practical possibilities are made available. In its most immediate guise, this ground is the organized local setting, a totality (albeit not without contradictions) of tools, artifacts, and institutions in which our projects take (their) place. In a deeper analysis it is our culture that makes practical possibilities available, appropriate to the subject’s place in it; that subject is never natural or universal but always gendered, ethnic, and classed. Genders, ethnic groups, and social classes are themselves social possibilities that we always find we have already taken up; gender, ethnicity, and class are both modes of embodiment and modes of collectivity. It is in this sense that we belong to history rather than it belonging to us, and that tradition is the deepest ground from which our projects spring (see MacIntyre, 1984, 1988).

A third implication of Heidegger’s analysis is that it shows that inter-
pretation is not a special type of analysis necessary for, and restricted to, textual exegesis; it is a mode of comprehension, of grasping the world, rooted in our human way of being in the world. Properly understood, interpretation is a tendency inherent to our way of being. The phenomena to which literary interpretation draws our attention—holism between the text grasped in its entirety and its parts, the progressive articulation from a preliminary reading, the way reading is shaped by anticipation and assumption—find their counterparts, indeed their primordial forms, in our everyday existence as cultural beings.

In the most general terms, then, interpretation illuminates the different aspects of a phenomenon, along with the ground upon which that phenomenon stands out and from which it draws its possibilities. In terms more specific to humans, it describes the possible ways we have of comporting ourselves, and the cultural and historical grounds from which these ways are taken up and transformed. Translated into the terminology of a study of moral development, interpretation entails studying children's ways of acting in, and understanding, their relations with others; the sources of these ways in our culture, viewed as a tradition extended in time; how these ways are transformed as they are taken up; and how they transform the children who appropriate them in action.

Children in a kindergarten playground (see Packer and Richardson, 1991) are situated in a world of artifacts, equipment, and arenas of activity, the organization of which embodies a manifold of cultural possibilities. These possibilities can be recognized in the modes of activity that are sanctioned and those that are not (what counts as hurting others, breaching rights of possession and occupation), the provision of artifacts that are at one and the same time expressively designed for children (as "toys" and "playthings"), and miniature copies of implements of the home and the workplace, and the very fact that the playground is a place of play as distinct from study. The playground is the material ground for children's activity, posing preconditions that both constrain that activity and provide powerful resources for it. Children's active "projection" of these possibilities can be seen when they take them up in ways that test and often breach adult expectations, so that the adults must be forever vigilant for these breaches. Girls "marry" girls; "swords" are forged from "shovels"; a "safe" climbing structure becomes a place for daring leaps. Teachers constantly work to correct these misinterpretations of the playground's possibilities.

Seen in these terms, moral development is not a matter of adopting social norms, or constructing rationally compelling ethical principles, or establishing an unproblematic consensus among equals. It is rather a matter of resolving, as best one can, moral obligations that have a history, obligations that reflect and shape a response to the demands—the call—of existence in a world that is fundamentally not of our own making. (This position can be contrasted with most social constructivist positions. Talk

of the "social construction of reality" does seem to involve a view of the subject as somehow having taken over the transcendent power of a deity. To say that humans "construct" the world would be the height of hubris except, of course, that all the statement actually means is that our knowledge of the world is socially constructed. Once more, epistemology has been given unquestioned priority.) In other words, Heidegger's analysis draws our attention to the ways in which we unwittingly both hand down and reconfigure cultural tradition in our actions:

None of us finds himself placed in the radical position of creating the ethical world ex nihilo. It is an inseparable aspect of our finite condition that we are born into a world already qualified in an ethical manner. . . . We can perhaps "transvaluate" values, but we can never create them beginning from zero. The passage through tradition has no other justification than this antecedence of the ethical world with regard to every ethical subject. But, on the other hand, we never receive values as we find things. . . . Our interest in emancipation introduces . . . "ethical distance" into our relation to any heritage [Ricoeur, 1973, p. 164].

The radical interpretation that articulates this grounding of morality in tradition takes a narrative form. And simpler, more everyday interpretations can also appear as narratives. To see how narrative grows from action is to see that the relationship between action and narrative is neither a simple one of parallelism, where fixed action has an objectlike structure similar to fixed narrative, nor one of part to whole, where speech is one species of action. In interpretation it first becomes evident that human activity involves a complex system of part-whole relations, is pluri-valent, has a complex temporality, makes indexical reference to the circumstances of its production, yet at the same time escapes these circumstances—in short, that its characteristics are those we more readily attribute to narrative texts. But action and narrative are linked dialectically, as two aspects of a whole. When our practice breaks down, narrative enables us to make sense of the difficulty and uncover new courses of action. Narratives can grow from action in this way because human activity always operates within a world that is already interpreted, not explicitly but grasped in a particular manner. (Again, the way a mature science always operates within a taken-for-granted paradigm is a good, and familiar, example.) An effective narrative has the power to bring some aspect of this way that the world is grasped to light, and to show fresh possibilities for action. A persuasive narrative does not aim to make statements about the world that are merely descriptive; it aims to move the reader to action. (Narrative and emotion are closely linked here, hence the emphasis in classical rhetoric on the "pathetic" argument, the component of discourse that moves the audience to action by rousing emotions; Aristotle, 1954. Emotions can be considered
a form of interpersonal movement whose power comes from transforming the way the world is grasped; see De Rivera, 1977; Hall and Cobey, 1976.) Only when breakdown proves intransigent do we "step back" and resort to more general and abstract tools such as logical analysis and calculation (Packer, 1985, p. 1084), showing that the narrative mode of explanation undergirds and provides the possibility for the logical explanatory mode.

Finding a Place for Critique

We have considered how narrative can be appreciated and analyzed from several different aspects. Narrative is an organization of events and persons; it is open to different readings, and those readings are active construals; it refers to a world and opens up new ways of looking at that world; hence it opens up new possibilities for action, reflecting the fact that it typically grows out of a breakdown or conflict in practice. We have considered how human existence itself is a way of understanding the world and, as such, contains the origins of a narrative mode of interpretation and explication. Finally, we can consider how narrative, viewed now as enactive as well as representational, points toward a new moral order, and the implications of this view of narrative for the study of moral development.

Attention to narrative promises to resolve a dilemma that presently confronts developmental psychology. To talk of development requires reference to criteria of some kind, yet in the moral realm the choice of criteria seems quite problematic. Appeal to universal, logically compelling ethical principles has been convincingly called into question, as has the notion of unproblematic social consensus. On what basis, then, can an evaluation or critique of the moral adequacy of an action be conducted? On the face of it, interpretation seems unlikely to provide an answer. To many, the conduct of interpretation connotes relativism, a subjective exegesis that operates only internally to the text and so abandons the possibility of genuine critique. But this characterization is unwarranted; we have already seen that interpretation considers both the narrative and its setting.

One way to appreciate the close interconnections of interpretation and evaluation is by reviewing the debate between Gadamer and Habermas on the relations between hermeneutics and critical theory (see McCarthy, 1978; Mendelson, 1979; Misgeld, 1976; Ormiston and Schrift, 1990; Ricoeur, 1990). Habermas’s interest in hermeneutics was piqued by its emphasis on the essentially historical dimension of understanding and interpretation (Habermas, 1967). Gadamer (1985) argued that every analysis is structured by the analyst’s interested position in a cultural tradition. This accorded well with the belief, central to critical theory, that any claim to have successfully adopted a neutral, detached, and objective attitude should be viewed as ideological. As McCarthy (1978, p. 179) puts it, Habermas came to see that "if the social scientist is not to proceed with his head in the sand, he must reflectively take into account the dependence of his conceptual apparatus on a prior understanding that is rooted in his own sociocultural situation. He must become hermeneutically and historically self-conscious."

This view gible with Habermas’s (1971) analysis of knowledge constitutive interests. But precisely because Gadamer insisted that the act of interpretation is shaped through and through by tradition, Habermas maintained that hermeneutic interpretation needs to be conjoined with a critique of ideology in order to question the tradition’s legitimacy and authority. Tradition, in his view, contains elements of distortion, repression, and domination from which we must struggle to free ourselves. Rational reflection, a matter of distanciation and critique rather than of interpretation, can profoundly alter the medium of tradition. Critical theory and hermeneutics could, in this sense, work as a team: “Hermeneutics comes up against the walls of the traditional framework from the inside, as it were. As soon as these boundaries have been experienced and recognized, cultural traditions can no longer be posed as absolute... Hermeneutic experience that encounters this dependency of the symbolic framework on actual conditions changes into the critique of ideology” (Habermas, 1967, cited in McCarthy, 1978, p. 183). But this kind of critique requires a system of reference that is located outside or beyond tradition. Habermas sought this critical position in an analysis of economic and political forces operating, at a level distinct from that of language, to establish material conditions that provide an objective framework for social action.

Gadamer (1990) responded that Habermas presented a “dogmatic” conception of critique, and that reflection and critique themselves occupy a place in traditional practices. Furthermore, the operation of political and economic interests could, he argued, be brought to light in interpretation, as preconceptions and prejudices. Reflection and understanding should not be viewed as distinct, even opposed, in the sense that one deals with critique and the other with interpretation. Reflection is an integral moment of struggling to understand, and, in addition, reflection is itself always partial and incomplete, based on preconceptions. At the same time, interpretation can break down any tradition’s claim to be natural and objective.

It becomes clear in reviewing this debate that hermeneutics and critical theory are by no means radically at odds; on the contrary, they share presuppositions about knowledge and interest, tradition and understanding. Each places emphasis on elements tacit but present in the other. Both employ the strategy of assigning quasi-transcendental status to certain fundamental types of action (Mendelson, 1979); both see engaged understanding constructing apparently natural knowledge and artifacts. The Marxist tradition of critical theory employs interpretation and presupposes an existential analysis not at odds with Heidegger’s account of the production of the person and the reproduction of society in and through praxis, includ-
could be better. People tell stories when their lives press forward against some blockage or breakdown. “Making sense” is seldom a casual exercise; we struggle to make sense in order to make our world different, to make ourselves different. In this activity lies a way of thinking of moral development not as the inevitable construction of universal ethical principles, but as the contingent, partial, and precarious attainment of a moral order, with both subjective and objective aspects, whose telos becomes apparent in the effort to make sense of, and overcome, practical problems of human relationships.

Conclusion

There is an illusionary assumption in developmental psychology that contemporary children’s development has escaped from tradition (or, more accurately, that tradition is simply irrelevant to it), that it is a matter of logical constructions derived only from relations in the present. But this idea of children individually constructing progressively advanced and elaborated schemes for instrumental mastery and social efficacy has to be understood historically, as a product of our modern world and the self-understanding it entails. In this world the ideology of the “rational system” predominates. The power, therefore, of giving fresh attention to narrative text stems, in part, from the example such texts provide of complex systems of internal relations, whose elements cannot be defined or described in isolation. This contrasts both with the image of purely external transactions between independent entities that drives statistical analysis, and with the image of the logical holism of a rational system emphasized by structural epistemologists and cognitive scientists. Both these images of the human world exclude all reference to its constitutive social and historical grounding, and to the interested stance of who we live in.

We often take for granted our purposes when we study children’s morality and moral development. Although it is easy to see ourselves as mature and those we study as somehow less formed, less informed, to think that we as adults are ahead of them, they are nonetheless our future, and in that regard their way lies ahead of ours. They will play out the possibilities they take from us, possibilities that we have handed down to them. We are their guardians now, but they will become guardians of our tradition and culture. If we can see, and understand, how they are taking up the ways we have been living, generally unreflectively, we are in a better position to understand how we live and evaluate what we are giving them. Their difficulties reflect our own problems and failures. An understanding of the conflicts that they work to resolve may enable us to change for the better the world in which we all live. The narratives that they construct and recount to their peers and to adults voice our conflicts and contradictions and point out new possibilities from which we all can learn.
References

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Mendelson, J. "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate." New German Critique, 1979, 18, 44-75.
The concept of development, whatever the specific domain of interest, is intrinsically bound up with both the idea of narrative and the idea of the moral.

Rewriting the Self: Development as Moral Practice

Mark Freeman

In this chapter I develop the argument that the idea of narrative must be understood not only as a methodological approach to the study of moral development but also as an intrinsic facet of the concept of development. Further, and by extension, I argue that the concept of development, taken here in the broad sense of a progressive movement toward desired ends, is necessarily tied to the moral, for the simple reason that this progressive movement itself is unthinkable outside of some conception of where it ought to be heading. To this extent, it can plausibly be maintained that the concept of development, whatever the specific domain of interest, is intrinsically bound up with both the idea of narrative and the idea of the moral. With these brief introductory comments in mind, an important question immediately arises: If, in fact, there is no objectively based, universally prescribable "ought" to be identified a priori, that is, ahead of the dynamic movement of life itself, then how are we to speak about development at all?

Consider for a moment what two artists whom my colleagues and I studied had to say about their own respective processes of "development." One of them, having carried out his work for a number of years under what he called "masklike" values, eventually realized that he had unwittingly placed more importance on his being acceptable as a certain

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