



Living Backwards: Time, Memory and Narratives HON 201A: Prompts for writing response #6

Instructions:

1. Format: 2 pages; 12-point type; double line-spaced
2. Deadline: Thursday, March 14 in class

Here are the prompts:

Ludwig's "Living Backwards," from Mind Readings

Do you agree with Ludwig's central premise, that we live our lives "backwards" to a certain degree, by shaping our notions of self around the life stories, plots, and roles we inherit from the social context we grow up in?

"One tenet of a certain kind of 19th century evangelical Christianity is that you model your life on the Good Book." Agree? Disagree? What are the implications, in particular on the notion of a free will?

"You simultaneously live in your imagination and in the real world, even though these experiences may not be in synch." Agree or disagree?

Are our lives in fact 'progressions'? Or are they also or even more a realization of the (imagined) past? In other words, if you believe your life has what Ludwig calls "narrative flow," how much of that coherence is imagined or interpreted, and how much is "real" or "found"?

To what extent do you think we indeed have free will and choice and, conversely, to what degree do you think we become who we are destined (by genetics or biology, our family backgrounds, our culture heritage, our geography, etc.) to be?

Ludwig wrote that he is uncomfortable "with the too easy distinction between a false front or public self on the one hand versus the real self or the authentic self on the other." What do you make of this statement, or problem?

When, like the artist in the middle of page 296, do you feel most authentic, or experience a "disappearing or vanishing or losing or scooping out whatever original sense of self" you think you are or have?

"Each culture has its own mythology containing the common dreams and aspirations of its collective people" (p. 298). Think of heroes and villains, good

v. evil, quests and journeys, founding 'fathers', etc. What are your or our harmonizing or stabilizing myths?

Of the types of life stories presented on pages 298-300, which one(s) are most salient or attractive or relevant to you? The middle-class story of professional success? Musicians and artists bent on self-destruction? Long-suffering wife or mother? Unconventional bohemian life, etc.?

Imagine living life today with someone else's memories and none of your own. How would this influence or determine the day? How different would you be?

From p. 300 and the discussion of roles and scripts, what are some of the roles you either choose or are required to adopt or play on your particular "world's stage"? How much of your own personal identity do these roles inform?

What is the role of death in how we "live our lives backwards"? Think of Ludwig's ideas about Adam, and about how differently Adam conceived of his own life or story before and after the finitude of death. What are the implications for the rest of us?

Bottom line: To what extent do we genuinely have power to shape or determine our own lives? How do you know? Are you really in charge?