Dementia Action Alliance

Annual Event
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Philosophical dimensions of dementia

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Plan

- Introduction and why philosophy?
- An old paradigm of personhood in dementia
- A new paradigm
- Consequences
Why philosophy?

‘Plumbing and philosophy are both activities that arise because elaborate cultures like ours have, beneath their surface, a fairly complex system which is usually unnoticed, but which sometimes goes wrong. ... When the concepts we are living by work badly, they don’t usually drip audibly through the ceiling or swamp the kitchen floor. They just quietly distort and obstruct our thinking.’


Mapping the terrain: an optimistic outlook?
Personhood

- Component 6 of the Ethical Framework:
- Recognising personhood, identity and value: The person with dementia remains the same, equally valued, person throughout the course of their illness, regardless of the extent of the changes in their cognitive and other functions.
An old paradigm of personhood

John Locke (1632-1704) on the person:

‘... a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and ... essential to it’

(Locke 1964, p. 211[II. xxvii. 9])
Implications of Locke for dementia

‘... as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person’

(Locke 1964, p. 212[II. xxvii. 9])
Psychological connectedness is the holding of particular direct connections. Psychological continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness.
A new paradigm
Stephen Post and “hypercognitivism”

‘Because memory is a form of power, we can sometimes find in those who have lost such power the opportunity to mock and ignore, sending the message that their very existence rests on a mistake’ (Post 2006, p. 224)
The SEA View

- Situated
- Embodied
- Agent

The situated person

- **Culture**: traditions, norms, history
- **Personal history**: wishes, inclinations, concerns, memories
- **Social context**: neighbours, friends, family, geography, law
- **Morals**: virtues and values
- **Spiritual values**: religion, openness to other
Merleau-Ponty (1962)  
*Phenomenology of Perception*  

‘The world is not what I think, but what I live through’  

*(Preface, p. xviii)*
Merleau-Ponty (1962)
*Phenomenology of Perception* (p. 169)

‘The body is our general medium for having a world’
Charles Taylor (1995)

*Philosophical Arguments* (pp. 170-1)

‘Our body is not just the executant of the goals we frame, ... Our understanding is itself embodied. That is, our bodily know-how, and the way we act and move, can encode components of our understanding of self and world. ... My sense of myself, of the footing I am on with others, is in large part also embodied.’
The person must be seen as:
‘... engaged in practices, as a being who acts in and on a world’
Consequences

Understanding
Encounters
Rights
Communities
Understanding

‘... words do not do their work by arousing representations associated with them. Language has inner content but the meaning of words is not entirely contained in the words themselves; rather, their meaning emerges from and is influenced by the contextual discourse. During interactions, words assume a gestural significance ...’


Pia Kontos
Encounters

₀ We encounter dementia-in-the-world:
 ₀ ‘...dementia-in-the-world is the realization of any and all versions of the stories that might be told – good and bad – about people with dementia’

₀ Then we see the total situation of the person: the human-person-perspective
 ₀ ‘... the world of real human encounters, where embodied subjects meet in the raw’ (ibid. p. 208)
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

Article 12: equal recognition before the law.

Sections 2 and 3 of Article 12,

‘recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others’ and

they should be supported ‘in exercising their legal capacity’

Implications for MCA etc.
Communities

- **Inclusivity**: dementia friendly societies
- **Stigma**: from personal to policy
- **Solidarity**: Component 5:
  - ‘The requirement to act in accordance with solidarity:
    - The need to recognise the citizenship of people with dementia, and to acknowledge our mutual interdependence and responsibility to support people with dementia, both within families and in society as a whole.’

Solidarity: Reflections on an emerging concept in bioethics by Barbara Prainsack and Alena Buyx, Nuffield Council on Bioethics (2011)

‘5.3 In our understanding, and in its most bare-bone form, solidarity signifies shared practices reflecting a collective commitment to carry ‘costs’ (financial, social, emotional, or otherwise) to assist others.

5.4 It is important to note that solidarity is understood here as a practice and not merely as an inner sentiment or an abstract value. Solidarity requires actions. Motivations and feelings such as empathy etc. are not sufficient to satisfy this understanding of solidarity, unless they manifest themselves in acts.’
Thank you

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