Fractured Narrative Self-Understanding

Samuel van Bruchem

Student number: 3581888

Master's Thesis for the Research Master in Philosophy

Utrecht University

Submitted: August 17, 2017

Supervisor: Dr. Joel Anderson

Second reader: Dr. Niels van Miltenburg

Third reader: Dr. Sander Werkhoven

Abstract

In this thesis, I will argue against two related propositions concerning the narrative conception of personal identity: (1) we necessarily see ourselves as a diachronic whole; and (2) we must see ourselves as a diachronic whole in order to live the good life. In order to do so, I will introduce the concept of Fractured Narrative Self-Understanding, meaning that one's personal experience can no longer be made intelligible under a single narrative. I will maintain that psychologically healthy people can experience themselves of having different selves at different times, which does not imply that these people take themselves to be more than one person. I will argue that there is no reason to presuppose that FNSU necessarily decreases either hedonic or eudaimonic well-being. The importance of FNSU is that it is attentive to the consequences of contextual shifts, thereby providing a conceptual analysis that helps to capture the experiences of several underrepresented groups such as former Scientology members.

Acknowledgements

Although writing a Master's thesis is an almost stereotypically solitary activity, many people have contributed, both directly and indirectly, to the creation of this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, dr. Joel Anderson, for his many sharp comments, enthusiastic encouragement, and offerings of emotional support when I experienced difficulties in my personal life that kept me from writing as much as I would have liked. Both professionally and personally, I could not have wished for a better supervisor. Thank you to dr. Niels van Miltenburg (congratulations on becoming a father!) and dr. Sander Werkhoven for agreeing to be my second and third reader respectively. Utrecht University has provided me with the opportunity to develop myself as a researcher and a teacher through various teaching assistantships, for which I am very thankful. Without these assistantships I would not have been able to support myself and afford being a student in their program. I am also grateful to Utrecht University and to the WiPRMAPhil for providing me with an opportunity to present this thesis as work in progress. I have received valuable feedback from Natascha Rietdijk and Lotje Siffels, for which I am grateful. For a general willingness to listen, tactfulness in asking about my thesis, and many opportunities to temporarily forget about my thesis over coffee, lunch, or beers, I thank the other students of the RMA Philosophy department.

I have been lucky enough to find many sources of support outside of my university as well. I would like to thank Holly van Klaveren for always encouraging me to follow my dream of studying Philosophy and for always believing that I would come through. Without you I would never have begun this journey. I am also grateful to Iris van den Bergh for relentlessly probing me about my thesis and providing me with many hugs and opportunities to work on my thesis while making sure she was working on hers, although we both know that my real job was to keep you from working too hard. Mariska van Bruchem and Mat Schimmel generously provided me with a place inside their home when I temporarily had no place to go. Guys, I hope the moved boxes, assembled furniture, and pallets of beer at least kind of made up for it. My Bermudese friends showed some interest in what I was doing, but mostly provided me with lots of timely distractions and more laughs than I can describe within a 40,000 word limit. May we never run out of board games to play and may the flow of our WhatsApp feed never stop! Thank you to Kristina Avila for deciding that my thesis might

actually be interesting after going through my PowerPoint presentation, to Maffy Lau for pushing me to keep on doing Philosophy and for encouraging me to apply to UBC as often as I can (I am sorry they still have not accepted me), to Beijing Normal University for providing me with a wonderful opportunity to visit China and learn about Chinese philosophy, and to all professors at UU who supported me through my many attempts to apply for a PhD position by encouragement, advice, and their willingness to recommend me whenever I asked. It has been a great blessing for me to experience just how many people believed in me and in what I was doing, and I am deeply grateful to all of you.

I have had more questions and conversations about my thesis topic than I can possibly mention here. If I did not mention you by name, please know that it is not because you did not make an impact and that I will strive to do you justice next time. To all of you whose names remain unmentioned but who did contribute in any way, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1: IDENTITY, NARRATIVITY, AND SELFHOOD

Chapter 1: Introduction

There are many ways in which the question “who am I?” is asked in everyday life by philosophers and non-philosophers alike. Remarks like “I was besides myself”, “you didn't see the real me”, or “I'm not really myself today” reveal some of the complexities of the ways in which we relate to our own behaviours, thoughts, and attitudes. Moreover, when we disavow certain actions or endorse or reject certain viewpoints we tell others something about how we want to be seen. In that sense, personal identity is not a mere factual given, not something that happens to be true of us but is a matter of indifference, but something that matters to us. One of the benefits of investigating a topic like personal identity is that, despite the profound philosophical problems that surround this concept, it is never too far removed from our daily lives.

Broadly speaking, the question about personal identity that interests me in this thesis is what unifies all of our different thoughts and experiences into the kind of single whole that the notion of personal identity is supposed to pick out. I will take up this question by looking at this question from one perspective that has been developed by several philosophers in the past few decades, which is the perspective of narrativity. So-called “narrativists” contend that we conceive of ourselves primarily or exclusively in narrative form. On such accounts, one's personal narrative constitutes one's personal identity by organising one's different experiences into a single, coherent whole. In its strongest form, it has been suggested that there must necessarily be a narrative structure underlying all of our experiences. If this is true, then this narrative structure would unify all of our experiences, no matter how outlandish or out-of-character these might seem to be. This is the idea of narrative unity in its strongest, most straightforward form.

Like personal identity, narrative unity is not supposed to be of mere metaphysical import, but instead is expected to bear directly on our personal lives. More specifically, it has been suggested that having a unified narrative is necessary for living the good life. Such a statement is unproblematic if you presume that people ordinarily have a unified narrative, but it raises difficult questions once that presumption is challenged. The most radical challenge to that position, would be to suggest that some people do not engage in narrativity at all. However, it is also possible to challenge the idea of *narrative unity* without challenging the

idea of *narrativity*. The main purpose of this thesis is precisely to set up a challenge of this kind.

In order to challenge this conception of narrative unity as necessary for living the good life, I will outline the conceptual possibility that mentally healthy people may have a disunified narrative self-understanding. Cases of disunified narrativity have been mentioned previously in the literature, but in such cases disunity was attributed to the effects of mental illnesses like schizophrenia. Although gaining more insight in the devastating effects of these illnesses is unquestionably important, such cases present a picture of people exhibiting narrative disunity as pitiable fringe cases. I intend to augment this conception by putting forward an account of disunified narrative self-understanding that focuses on cases that do not have the insurmountable problems associated with severe mental illnesses. My alternative relies on the observation that changing circumstances in one's personal life may require one to adapt one's narrative self-understanding in order to retain its unity, and that one may conceivably be unable to do so. Such an inability to adapt to changing circumstances would conceptually make one's narrative self-understanding fractured. To capture the possibility one is unable to do this, I will introduce the concept of *Fractured Narrative Self-Understanding* (FNSU).

In the second part of my thesis, I will discuss in detail what FNSU amounts to, how it may feature in one's personal experience, and what its effects are on one's well-being. The main purpose of the first part of my thesis is to set the stage for this discussion. I will do so by providing a dialectical treatment of recent discussions on personal identity, implicit narrativity and different views on selfhood. Chapter 2 briefly reminds the reader of Descartes' views on the “I” before discussing two opposing views on personal identity: diachronic atomism and diachronic holism. According to diachronic atomists, talk of a persistent “I” is an illusion in the sense that there is nothing that persists throughout one's lifetime. Moreover, coming to this realisation can have positive effects on one's well-being. Diachronic holists, on the other hand, have maintained that people naturally see their lives as a whole and that we need to do so in order to pursue the good life. The notion of a 'narrative quest', and of narrativity more generally, was introduced to capture the goal-directed nature of our lives. The point of discussing the views of these diachronic holists is to show how they maintain that one's life as well as one's self-understanding is not a kind of *tabula rasa* which one inscribes with meaning, but that narrativity is a deep and inescapable part of our lives, a part we simply need to live our lives meaningfully.

The idea of narrativity thus spelled out was radically challenged by Galen Strawson, who avows that he does not engage in any form of narrativity beyond describing the sequence of events involved in, say, making coffee. There is, of course, nothing deep or meaningful about descriptions of how to make coffee. Strawson's self-avowal therefore presents narrativists with a dilemma: either narrativity is trivial in the same way that descriptions of making coffee are trivial, or Strawson is mistaken about himself and narrativity is inescapable after all. This dilemma, and two lines of response to it, will be the focal point of Chapter 3. The most important similarity between these lines of response is that they emphasise how narratives are not explicitly told through our stories, but are implicitly lived through our actions. The main point of discussing these responses is that they present a different form of narrativity, usually called implicit narrativity. It will be necessary to get this form of narrativity into view, since any challenge to narrative unity needs to deal with both forms of narrativity.

At this point, little has been said about the connection between narrativity and selfhood. However, if a challenge to the idea of narrative unity is to be posed, one important question is whether the self is narrative or if people have a narrative sense of self. To get this question into view, Chapter 4 will examine two different views on selfhood. Firstly, I will look at Dan Zahavi's answer to the question what conditions are necessary for minimal selfhood to obtain. Zahavi's answer is of interest because he has been critical of narrativists' conception of selfhood in several of his publications. I will juxtapose his account of minimal selfhood with Anthony Rudd's view that the self is essentially narrative. Both Zahavi's and Rudd's account have been articulated with great clarity, which will make it easier to identify the areas of conflict between both positions. Getting these differences into view will be helpful in distinguishing between narrative, selfhood, and personhood. This will provide the conceptual tools to describe the context in which the articulation of FNSU in Part 2 is to be situated. Before this articulation is presented, however, I will provide a brief interlude to situate the approach I will take in the nexus of positions discussed in Part 1 and to introduce the second part of my thesis.

Chapter 2: Personal identity over time

2.1: The self as substance

The question what constitutes personal identity is one of philosophy's perennial problems. Ever since Plato, there have been many who considered the unchanging to be the most real and who treated appearances and evanescences as possessing a lower degree of reality. With respect to personal identity this leads to a familiar picture, spelled out in Descartes' *Meditations,* in which the "I" or the thinking substance is indubitably real, while the reality of extended substance can only be inferred from more certain principles. There are two parts to Descartes' understanding: firstly, there is a thinker, an "I", who invariably has all the thoughts that a person has, and secondly, this thinker is substantially different from the material world upon which thought may impose itself. The problems with this second claim, most notably the mind-body problem, are so familiar now that they need not be explicated here. Nonetheless, Cartesianism has proven time and again to be difficult to exorcise entirely. The main reason for this difficulty is probably the first part of Descartes' picture: the idea that there is a persistent "I" who does all the thinking (and, we would nowadays add, all the acting, observing, remembering, feeling, and so on) is intuitively appealing. If this intuition is sound, it raises the question how it is possible that, like Theseus' ship, our bodily parts are subject to constant decay and renewal, while at the same time we remain the same person over time. The challenge, then, is, as it has been for much of 20th century philosophy, to come up with a clear response to this question without lapsing once again into Cartesianism.

2.2: Diachronic atomism: Parfit and Strawson

Derek Parfit

One response to the Cartesian challenge is to argue that whether there is a persistent entity that underlies all our thoughts and experiences is not a good question in the sense that it has no true answer. In his highly influential work *Reasons and Persons,* Derek Parfit uses a number of thought experiments to demonstrate the problems inherent in this question. Parfit's point with these thought experiments is to argue that the identity of the person, or *who* is having thoughts, is not what matters about the thoughts a person has. In a thought experiment named Physics Exam, Parfit imagines himself pressing a switch that allows both his

hemispheres to work separately on two different ways to solve a physics problem.[1] While Parfit is working on this problem, there are two streams of consciousness that are continuous with the person who began the physics exam, but evidence from brain bisection suggests to Parfit that only one of these streams is consciously accessible at the same time. If there is an I who has all the thoughts in the Physics Exam, the question becomes which of these streams of consciousness is that I. Parfit uses a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to problematise all possible answers that may be given to this question. If a true answer to this question is expected, and if no unproblematic description can be given of a persistent thinker in cases like the Physics Exam, then the problem might lie with the question that is being asked. In other words, it is at least conceivable, Parfit thinks, that the persistence of a single thinker is not what matters.

If the persistence of a single thinker is not what matters, then, on his view, what does matter? To put Parfit's answer concisely in a manner that requires considerable unpacking, what matters according to him is the holding of Relation R between self-standing mental states. This is a version of what Parfit calls the Psychological Criterion, according to which personal identity over time is just the continuity of a series of connected mental experiences.[2] This criterion is a revision of the position put forward by John Locke, who held that personal identity over time can only go so far back as a person's memory extends to the past. As Parfit notes, Lockeanism in its original form would make ordinary cases of forgetfulness in our daily lives incomprehensible. However, instead of requiring a direct memory of each and every experience for personhood, Parfit develops a revised Lockeanism in which personal identity over time consists of an overlapping set of connections between memories. What this overlapping set of connections means, is that today I have memories of what I did yesterday, that yesterday I had memories of what I did the previous day, and so on. This relation of continuity between mental states is what Parfit calls Relation R.

As Parfit is well aware, continuity is a transitive relation, meaning that if I am the same person today as I was yesterday, and that relation holds for each day in the past twenty years between myself on a given day and myself on the day after that, by virtue of relations of continuity I would be the same person today as I was twenty years ago. However, I do not

1 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 1991), 244-248.

2 Ibid., 204-209.

identify with the person I was twenty years ago in the same way I identify with myself from yesterday, even if on each day in the past twenty years I identified with the person I was on the day before. In other words, personal identity, unlike psychological continuity, is intransitive. To express this intransitive aspect of personal identity, Parfit uses the term psychological connectedness.[3] Parfit requires that for psychological continuity there needs to be a strong connectedness between a person at different times, which means that a large number of connections hold between that person at a certain point in time and that person at a different point in time. So defined, Parfit can explain why he is the same person he was yesterday, but not the same person he was twenty years ago: there are fewer connections holding between himself from twenty years ago and himself from now than there are between himself yesterday and himself today. For Parfit, both continuity and strong connectedness matter for Relation R.

Parfit recognises that there are different ways in which Relation R can be physically constituted, which raises the question as to how we should think about the causal relationship between mental states and the physical states that constitute them. One position would be that there needs to be a normal cause or a reliable cause of connected mental experiences. The version of this argument that is most fashionable today is to argue that mental experiences are reliably caused by brains, so that a continuous series of mental experiences would require the continued existence of a brain. If a version of this argument holds, then what would matter for personal identity on Parfit's view would not only be Relation R, but also its causal constituents. This, however, is not Parfit's view. Parfit uses thought experiments like the Teletransporter, in which a person's body is disintegrated on Earth but immediately reassembled on Mars, to illustrate cases where there is no physical continuity underlying psychological continuity.[4] On Parfit's view, because of the strong connections between the memories of that person on Mars and the memories on Earth, that person would be the same person. Therefore, Parfit concludes that what matters for personal identity is Relation R with any cause, even if that cause would imply physical discontinuity.

3 Ibid., 206.

4 Ibid., 199-201.

Parfit uses the language of successive selves to express the intransitive nature of psychological connectedness.[5] In terms of this language, instead of thinking of my future self as myself in the future, I might see my future self as a different person whose experience happens to be psychologically continuous with mine. Whether or not I see this future self as me would then depend on the degree of psychological connectedness. Although the language of successive selves suggests that there really are successive selves, Parfit warns against the danger of taking the language of successive selves too literally. The language of successive selves serves to help people express a difference between who they were, who they are, and who they might be. Seen from this light, the question of whether there is an I who thinks all my thoughts becomes a straightforwardly psychological question about overlapping chains of connectedness between mental states throughout my life. I may come to attribute all my thoughts to a single me because I remain strongly connected with myself at each moment in time. Metaphysically speaking, however, just as the question which of the two streams of consciousness in the Physics Exam is me does not have an answer, the question whether a future version of myself is me is a moot question for Parfit.

Taken together, Parfit argues for a radical diachronic atomism in two senses: (1) mental states are divested from their physical constitution, and (2) mental states are occurrent and are connected by a relation of sameness rather than as parts of an indivisible stream. With respect to (1) it should be noted that Parfit does not believe that mental states exist independently of *any* physical constitution (which would imply Cartesianism), but rather holds that the relation between mental states and their physical constituents is contingent. What then follows is that nothing is lost if the same mental state is constituted in a different physical manner, meaning that for Parfit our embodiment does not play an essential role in constituting our personal identity.

Galen Strawson

Galen Strawson, like Parfit, has developed a diachronically atomistic account of personal identity. In his article 'The Self' Strawson mentions eight criteria that, when taken together, he believes are sufficient to capture at least a minimal conception of how the self is ordinarily

5 Ibid., 302-306.

experienced or conceived.[6] On this ordinary conception, the self is (1) a thing, that is (2) mental, a singe thing both (3) synchronically and (4) diachronically, (5) ontically distinct from all other things, (6) a subject of experience, (7) an agent, and (8) which has a certain character or personality. Strawson sets out to argue in his article that conditions (4) and (8) are not necessary for selfhood. However, Strawson does not deny (4) and (8) on the grounds that there is not really such a thing as the self and that talking of the self simply constitutes a misunderstanding of the reflexive pronoun. Strawson is aware of criticisms along this line, but he makes the explicit choice to endorse (1). His defence of this decision is primarily phenomenological: we all have an experience of our selves and we all intuitively know what sentences in which the concept of the self is used mean. However, Strawson makes it clear that the self is not a thing in the same way that a table or a chair is. Instead, the self is a phenomenologically accessible mental thing, which on his view implies that there is a sense of the mental self that is accurate with respect to our mental self.[7] Although the term 'mental thing' may seem otiose, Strawson makes it explicit that he does not endorse substance dualism, nor does he believe that this view is tenable. However, other than its mentality, what kind of thing Strawson takes the self to be remains unclear. All Strawson has to say on this issue is that other metaphysical categories (states, properties, events, processes) do not capture how the self features in our thoughts and experiences. Strawson then argues by *reductio ad absurdum* that, if there is any reality to the self, it cannot take up any of these others categories and therefore it must be a mental thing of some kind.

With respect to the singularity of the self, Strawson argues that singularity cannot be metaphysically understood in an absolute sense, but must be understood relative to a principle of organisation like, for instance, having identical content.[8] Strawson's application of this point is to open up the possibility that we may experience our selves as single things even when there is no single non-mental unity underlying the self. Strawson uses a thought example in which one is brought to believe one's consciousness is constituted by three

6 Galen Strawson, "The Self", in: *Models of the Self,* ed. Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1999, 2000, 2001), 3-4.

7 The converse view here would be a neo-Kantian view according to which the implication does not hold that if there is such a thing as the self, then there is a sense of mental self that is (partially) accurate with respect to the nature of the self. Possibly the mental self is ineffable and unlike any experience of it. See Strawson, "The Self", 5.

8 Ibid., 8-13.

different brains and three different bodies. He argues that in such a case one would be likely to think "Wow, I have got three brains – I, the single thing or person that I am".[9] According to Strawson, this thought experiment shows that the experience of singleness does not subside as soon as the non-mental constitution of the experience turns out to be fragmented. In other words, the self appears to be single regardless of whether its underpinnings are also single. The leverage Strawson gets out of this thought experiment is that it creates the space to argue that the self is not necessary a diachronically single thing, even if the self appears to some as a single entity over time. In Strawson's view, there are significant differences between individuals in the way they experience themselves as selves over time. Strawson argues that these differences need to be the subject of a phenomenological investigation that should inform what we expect the self to be before we can even begin to ask the question whether or not there is such a thing. Strawson points out that there are several ways in which people may experience their selves in everyday life as shattered and multiple rather than as a diachronically single entity.[10] If this is true, but these people do nonetheless have a sense of their selves *as selves*, then the self should not be expected to be a diachronically single entity.

Strawson's argument against the self having a definite character is analogous to his argument against the diachronically single self. [11]There are clear differences between individuals in how consistent their personalities are over time. Some people exhibit stable behaviors, but others are behaviorally inconsistent or base their actions on the present circumstance. Moreover, these differences are reflected in different experiences that people have of themselves. While some people may see themselves as having a distinct character, others may care more about going in different directions or are simply uninterested in the question whether they have a consistent personality, meaning that the question of consistence does not feature in their personal experience. Again, phenomenological investigation of individual differences between people is a necessary prerequisite to track what different people believe to be essential with respect to their self. If for some (otherwise normal) people their self is not necessarily a diachronically single entity with a specific character, then conditions (4) and (8) should be dropped from the list of conditions that Strawson drew up earlier.

---

9 Ibid., 10.

10 Ibid., 12-13.

11 Ibid., 13-14.

To capture the account of the self that follows from his analysis, Strawson suggests his 'Pearl View' to replace the (in his view inept) metaphor of a stream of consciousness.[12] For Strawson, consciousness is not a steady stream, but an irregular fluttering, a coming into existence momentarily and fading once again. The existence of such selves is very brief: selves last up to three seconds on Strawson's view. To capture this quick succession of selves, Strawson uses the image of pearls on a long but finite string. Our selves are like those pearls in the sense that they are connected and succeed one another, but each of them is a unity in its own respect. However, for a person who applies a principle of organisation that looks at the similarities between selves as they emerge over, for instance, the span of a two-hour movie, these selves may appear to be in a continuous stream-like unity, or to put it in a way that would befit that person's phenomenology better, as a temporally extended self. According to Strawson such a person does not experience the self as temporally extended because the self essentially has that characteristic, but as a consequence of organising one's experience in a certain way. Therefore, experiences of a temporally extended self do not serve as counterexamples to Strawson's phenomenological account. The self exists as a synchronic unity that lasts for two or three seconds, and temporal extension of the self is a consequence of seeing several selves as connected under a principle of organisation that emphasises sameness of some kind.

At this point one may wonder with Parfit if a position like diachronic atomism , which may well be taken as being far removed from ordinary intuitions about who we are, is genuinely believable.[13] Parfit avows that he struggles to shed his intuition that there is something special about his continued existence entirely, but that he nonetheless believes that the view he developed is true. Moreover, he shares that adhering to diachronic atomism has added to his quality of life.[14] Parfit finds himself less concerned with his own life and more concerned with the lives of others, which has drawn him closer to other people. He is also less anxious about the inevitable prospect of his own death.[15] Strawson similarly mentions that believing in diachronic atomism can lessen anxiety about death in his new book *The Subject of*

12 Ibid., 17-19.

13 This concern is brought up in Parfit, *Reasons and Persons,* 274-280.

14 Ibid., 281-282.

15 I am well aware of the irony in bringing up this point in the same year that Parfit has passed away. I genuinely hope that Parfit continued to find his own view both believable and liberating.

Experience, although he makes the cautionary note that appreciating that death does not deprive us of anything will not entirely dissolve fear of death.[16] Elsewhere, Strawson has mentioned that diachronic atomism can lessen the degree to which one is affected by negative emotions that require a longer-term perspective, such as resentment.[17] The general point here is that that belief in diachronic atomism is not just possible as a matter of metaphysical speculation, but that such belief may well have positive effects on our lives. Most of the examples mentioned here concern the alleviation of negative emotions that tend to come with a longer-term outlook on life, but belief in diachronic atomism may also have positive emotional effects such as bringing one closer to others because of a stronger focus on the here and now.

2.3: Diachronic holism: MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur

Alasdair MacIntyre

According to philosophers like Parfit, the answer to the question "am I the same person as I was ten years ago?" is a matter of degree rather than a yes-or-no question. Although we can understand what it means to be more or less the same person as we were ten years ago, there is a problem with this answer. As Alasdair MacIntyre observes in *After Virtue,* we are known by others under the same name and with the same history for all of our lives. Therefore, in order to be held accountable we need to be able to respond to imputations of personal identity. Psychological continuity in Parfit's sense does not provide any metaphysical ground for such imputations. [18]What is missing in the account of Parfit, according to MacIntyre, is a narrative that provides our lives with the appropriate unity. This means that the unity of personal identity is preserved if and when people use a narrative to connect several disparate descriptions of themselves into a coherent whole that stretches from birth to death. The relation that ties these descriptions together is what MacIntyre calls intelligibility: the

16 Galen Strawson, *The Subject of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 92-105.

17 Galen Strawson, "Episodic Ethics", in: *Narrative and Understanding Persons,* ed. Daniel Hutto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 106-114.

18 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bloomsbury, 1981, 1985, 2007), 216-218.

Interestingly, on page 217 MacIntyre frames his discussion on personal identity as a disagreement between empirical or analytical philosophers on the one hand and existentialists on the other hand.

connection of actions with understandable human intentions, motives, passions or purposes. MacIntyre holds that relations of intelligibility do not supervene on basic actions that are made intelligible through a further act of narration. To the contrary, on his view actions under an intelligible description, or intelligible actions, are more primitive than so-called basic actions. Therefore, our descriptions of ourselves as agents must contain some kind of unity that precedes its dissection into separate component parts. This unity is constitutive of personal identity on MacIntyre's account.

Although MacIntyre thus sees narratives as constitutive of personal identity, he is careful to avoid the equation of personal identity with a character in a narrative. Instead, he claims that the relationship between personal identity and a narrative is that of mutual presupposition (which, as MacIntyre is quick to point out, implies that personal identity cannot be understood in isolation of narrative).[19] The importance of the distinction between personal identity and narrative (or, more precisely, a character in a narrative) is that MacIntyre holds that the concept of a person is an abstraction: it is "a character abstracted from a history".[20] As a consequence, the identity of a person (in the sense of their sameness over time) depends on the identity of a history, which must be expressed in a storied or narrative form. In other words, our identity as persons depends on the identity of the protagonists in our autobiographical narratives that track our personal history.

MacIntyre's recourse to narrative is not merely a response to the imputation of a stable personal identity by others. Instead, MacIntyre takes narratives to be essential for one's well-being. MacIntyre makes this case by arguing that having a narrative understanding of one's personal identity is necessary for one's pursuit of the good life. MacIntyre begins his discussion on narrativity and the good life by suggesting that the good life is, minimally, a life

19 Ibid., 217. Note that MacIntyre points out that, similar to a narrative, accountability and intelligibility are not more primitive than personal identity, but instead both accountability and intelligibility stand in a relation of mutual presupposition with personal identity.

20 Ibid., 219.

spent in search of the good life.[21] Such a pursuit is necessary, since there is no universal conception of what the good life consists in: the good life for a fifth-century Athenian farmer is not the same as the good life for a medieval nun or a seventeenth-century farmer.[22] Moreover, what the good life is for someone depends on the particular roles that this person inhabits. For instance, one is born as a son or a daughter of one's parents and as a member of one's tribe or nation. These roles provide the starting point from which one's life obtains its moral particularity. This starting point matters because the story of one's life is always and inescapably embedded in the story of a community from which one derives one's identity. MacIntyre immediately points out, though, that one always has the option of rebellion against one's identity as a mode of expressing one's identity.[23] Even so, what the good life consists in depends to a large degree on the roles one inhabits, as these co-constitute one's personal identity. One's personal identity and one's relation to the roles one inhabits are expressed through a narrative that connects one's personal history with the history of roles in one's tribe or culture, a narrative that expresses what the good life for a person such as oneself consists in.

MacIntyre uses the analogy between narratives and our lives to point out a feature that is characteristic of both: teleology. According to MacIntyre, there is no way of thinking of success and failure in one's life without a more or less determinate goal towards which one is striving.[24] To capture this feature of our lives, MacIntyre introduces the notion of a narrative quest. By narrative quest, MacIntyre means an ongoing real-life story of trying to achieve one's personal goals. It is only within the context of such a narrative quest that we can evaluate our lives by seeing how close we have come to achieving our personal goals. Our position is also similar to that of a character in a narrative in the sense that we do not know which goals we are going to achieve, which makes failure in our narrative quest a real possibility. In other words, we find ourselves in the midst of our own story, a story that continues to be written as we live and strive for our own personal goals.

21 Ibid., 221.

22 Ibid., 220.

23 Ibid., 220-221.

24 Ibid., 219.

The narrative self is necessary for MacIntyre's interpretation of Aristotelian virtue ethics. For MacIntyre, virtues are dispositions that help us to sustain practices and achieve goods that are internal to these practices. At the same time virtues also provide aid in one's narrative quest by enabling one to overcome obstacles and temptations and by providing increasing self-knowledge and knowledge of the good.[25] As such, virtues are necessary to increase one's understanding of what the good life consists in, and thereby making the good life possible. As mentioned before, MacIntyre takes the roles and practices of the community into which one is born as the starting point for one's particular moral point of view. This observation also matters for his conception of selfhood. If the self were to be fragmented away from the different social roles that a human may take up during her lifetime, then neither the self nor the fragments of personal identity that feature in social roles would be a proper locus for virtues. After all, MacIntyre argues, what distinguishes virtues from skills is that virtues are not domain-specific, but have their effects in all domains of a person's life. Therefore, the self as a stable center of personal identity, an identiy that is retained throughout life from birth to death, is essential for the cultivation of virtues that assist us in our narrative quest to learn about and to live the good life.

Charles Taylor

In arguing against Parfit's conception of personal identity, MacIntyre stressed the diachronic nature of personal identity and emphasised the importance of social roles, practices, and developing a greater understanding of one's own goals in order to live the good life. Much like MacIntyre, Charles Taylor has pointed out that selfhood, in his sense, requires a diachronic approach to understand the self's being directed at the attainment of some good. Taylor is more explicit, though, in his emphasis on the importance of language, suggesting that "[t]here is no way we can inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language".[26] There are several reasons why Taylor stresses language, but perhaps the most important is that we need language as a mode of discernment. As Taylor points out, there are many times when even independent adults need to talk through certain experiences with another person to get a clear sense of what they are experiencing. Taylor takes this familiar difficulty in expressing one's own experiences to suggest that the kind of confusion someone

25 Ibid., 219.

26 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 35.

without a language of discernment would experience is far greater.[27] In other words, language is necessary for us to even begin to make sense of our experiences.

Taylor's does not just focus on the relation between language and experience, but he also stresses the importance of communities. One is born into what Taylor calls "webs of interlocution", by which he means that there are always several conversation partners with which one stands in some sort of relation that are essential to one's self-understanding.[28] Taylor uses the metaphor of training wheels to point to describe the attitude towards selfhood and community he associates with individualism: community is only needed at the very beginning to get the self going, but plays no part in the identity of the "finished person".[29] Instead, Taylor points out that community continues to play an important role by providing interlocution that one can allow to position oneself, even if that means, like Taylor maintains Nietzsche at times has done, to position oneself as someone who has developed an insight that nobody else can comprehend.[30] Of course, this observation does not diminish the real difference between being in a community with like-minded others and being in a community where one sees others as not seeing eye to eye with oneself, but even the latter relation with one's community still requires some kind of input from people in one's community.

Taylor's main criticism of Parfit's position, however, is not so much that language and community play a bigger role than a position like Parfit conveys. Taylor's main criticism is that Locke (and by implication Parfit, who follows Locke here) defines the self in neutral terms, not including as essential any mode of self-concern that Taylor believes constitutes selfhood.[31] Taylor agrees with Parfit that, if the self is neutral,then it may not matter how we count selves. If, on the other hand, the self exists in a space of questions that concern one's well-being (as Taylor maintains), then the scope of these concerns determines what can be counted as a unit. According to Taylor, self-concern is directed at the good for one's life as a

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid. It is wholly unclear to me what, if anything, an individualist might take a 'finished person' to be if that person is still living, but Taylor's point is still clear enough if we substitute 'adult' here.

30 Ibid., 37.

31 Ibid., 49.

whole. Therefore, the self cannot be arbitrarily punctuated, but must be seen as a whole in order to place it into relation to the questions that matter to us.[32]

To develop how to understand this kind of wholeness, Taylor uses the notion of a narrative quest that MacIntyre had put forward.[33] According to Taylor, because we cannot avoid the question what ultimately matters to us, we inescapably and non-contingently see our lives in storied form. Taylor uses a spatial metaphor to suggest that what we take to be the good functions as a landmark that allows us to navigate moral space. This navigating can only be expressed in storied form. On Taylor's view, navigating moral space is not an optional extra, but what Taylor calls a transcendental condition of selfhood. Moreover, although there are many different things that may matter to us, in a culture like ours moral space is unified in the sense that what matters to us is seen from the vantage point of a single moral horizon.[34] Without such a single moral horizon, we cannot take up the right kind of position with respect to our lives that allows us to comparatively evaluate the different things that matter to us. Therefore, there is a single, unified space of moral concerns. The unity of moral space is reflected in the unity that selfhood exhibits, which extends throughout time to encompass our whole lives. Therefore, the expression 'I was a different person then' must be "either an overdramatized image, or quite false".[35] So, on Taylor's view, we necessarily have an orientation towards the good that provides us with an a priori unity and that gives us a sense of direction. Moreover, we have no other way to answer the question where we stand with respect to the good than to talk about our whole lives in storied form.

To understand why Taylor sees the need to argue for the ethical significance of a unified moral space, it is useful to look at his distinction between weak weighing and strong evaluation.[36] Weak weighing means that we assess our preferences comparatively to make a

---

32 Ibid., 50. Taylor uses the label 'punctual self' on page 49 to refer to the momentary nature of selfhood on Parfit's account, something that was described in Section 2.2 under the header diachronic atomism.

33 Ibid., 52.

34 Ibid., 51. Taylor mentions as a counterexample the kind of culture where one might undergo a ritual to be reborn as a reincarnated ancestor and may live one life as two different persons.

35 Ibid., 51.

36 Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?", in: *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1,* ed. Charles Taylor (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985): 15-44. Taylor

decision, for instance, about whether to go to a Greek or to an Indian restaurant. There is no reason to favour one alternative over another, but it is simply our preference at that given time ("I feel more like going for Indian today") that will determine our decision. Strong evaluation, on the other hand, requires that we make our underlying reasons and motives for decisions explicit, so that these can be a part of the decision process. In the case of more substantial decisions, like what subject to pick as your major, being able to reason about different choice options seems *prima facie* to lead to better decisions than to go with what you feel like at that moment. So Taylor's point with this distinction is that our lives become rather impoverished if we make all of our decisions in the same way in which we decide what restaurant to go to. However, strong evaluation requires not only that we make our reasons explicit, but also that we bring different choice options together under a common denominator in light of which we can evaluate these options. Therefore, if we want to evaluate our decisions in light of what ultimately matters to us, we need a single horizon under which our moral concerns are unified.

Paul Ricoeur

One of Parfit's central claims was that personal identity is not what matters for the good life. In *Oneself as Another,* Paul Ricoeur advances the criticism that Parfit has not asked the question *to whom* personal identity does not matter. Ricoeur distinguishes between two kinds of identity, *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, by which he means sameness or spatiotemporal continuity and the capacity to initiate novel actions respectively. According to Ricoeur, analytical philosophers like Parfit have focused on *idem*-identity, and in doing so are asking 'What?'-questions while ignoring 'Who?'-questions. Parfit in particular attempts to reduce selfhood to a set of sameness relations, thereby seeking to reduce *ipse*-identity to *idem*-identity. According to Ricoeur, the possibility Parfit has overlooked is that identity does not consist of a set of attributes or things that we have, but may also consist in who we are in terms of our intentions. We ordinarily experience ourselves as having the power to act, which raises the question whose intention is acted upon. Questions about the locus of intentional action are irreducible to 'What?'-questions, but require an answer in which an agent responds reflexively.

---

points to something similar in *Sources of the Self,* 25-32, but his account in "What is Human Agency" is, in my view, much clearer.

The dialectical point Ricoeur is making in his discussion of analytical philosophers' treatment of personal identity is that the relation of sameness and selfhood cannot be understood without an appeal to phenomenology. To bridge this gap between analytical and Continental approaches, Ricoeur introduces the notion of narrative identity. According to Ricoeur, we can only understand how we can have both *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity if the domains of 'What'-questions and 'Who?'-questions overlap. Narrative identity serves the purpose of bringing action theory and ethics together, thereby providing a domain in which we can intelligibly speak about persons both in terms of their descriptive sameness as well as their selfhood expressed in intentions, motivations, and the like. What follows from this is that a life-narrative by necessity must have a unity proper to it, and that characters of narratives must coincide with living human beings.

Ricoeur follows MacIntyre in arguing that it is necessary for an ethical perspective to apprehend our lives in a narrative unity. Ricoeur understands the narrative unity of a life as consisting of two movements in opposite directions: an ascending movement through which basic actions become more complex and a descending movement that starts from "the vague and mobile horizon of ideals and projects in light of which a human life apprehends itself in its oneness".[37] These movements meet in the domain of practices, which are fragmentary in light of a person's life plan, but which have their own pre-narrative unity proper to them. What is required for an ethical life, according to Ricoeur, is that we gather these fragments together into a whole, which then becomes subject to ethical appreciation. Because this ethical appreciation requires both a sense of ourselves as agents as well as a sense of sameness over time, the only way to accomplish this gathering together is through a narrative. In this sense, Ricoeur adopts MacIntyre's notion of "the narrative unity of a life".

The connection between narrative and personal identity in Ricoeur's work becomes clearest when he says that "[t]he idea of the narrative unity of a life serves to assure us that the subject of ethics is none other than the one to whom the narrative assigns a narrative identity".[38] This raises the question on what grounds an identity relation can be said to hold between the character in a narrative and ourselves as human beings. Here, Ricoeur seeks to distinguish himself from Cartesian certainty as well as Nietzschean suspicion. He does so with his notion

37 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as* Another (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 156.

38 Ibid., 178.

of attestation, by which he means that we attribute credence to our self-apprehension as characters in a narrative, even if we do not have (and will not have) certainty about our *ipse*-identity. Attestation is opposed to suspicion in the sense that it takes the truth of our attestations rather than their falsity as its viewpoint. To ground attestation, Ricoeur develops an ontology of the self in which there are two modes of being, which he takes to be the same as Heidegger's distinction between *vorhandenheit* and *Dasein.* On Ricoeur's view, unlike a being that is *vorhanden,* a being that is a self presupposes the existence of the world as the horizon of its thinking, feeling, and acting. This means that the self cannot be reduced to a list of things subsisting in the universe, but that the self must consist in something different, which for Ricoeur is the power to act. Ricoeur finds the metaphysical grounds for this power to act in Spinoza's *conatus,* which is a power by which all living beings persevere. Through the *conatus* the individual soul, as a mode of God or nature, is driven to attain the highest possible degree of existence, which means to obtain a greater degree of actuality in Aristotle's terms. This power is what provides the self with unity and what grounds the self as *Dasein* that has the world as the necessary source of its care. This care, which takes the form of thinking, feeling, and acting, is attested in the form of a narrative, which must express the concerns of the subject from the viewpoint of truth. What grounds the identity relation between the character in a narrative and the human being is the attestation of care that needs to be truthful for the human being to persevere.

Conclusion

The notion of narrativity was introduced in several contexts by proponents of diachronic holism to point to an ethical space in which we have to situate ourselves. Like Parfit and Strawson, these authors are interested in the question what adhering to their position would mean for our well-being. However, they approach well-being from a much different perspective. Both Parfit and Strawson alluded to the effects they experienced from seeing their selves as existing for only a brief period of time, both in terms of increased positive affect as well as decreased negative affect. One might say that Parfit and Strawson evaluate the causal effects of believing in diachronic atomism by considering its effects from a hedonic point of view. The approach taken by MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur is different in at least two respects. Firstly, they are not so much concerned with causal effects as they are with outlining formal constitutive components of the ethical domain. Secondly, they emphasise the good life in the sense of giving one's life purpose or direction.

Pointing out the different concerns these authors have may help to explain the different approaches taken by diachronic atomists on the one hand and diachronic holists on the other hand. However, such an enumeration should not be used to explain away the differences between diachronic atomism and diachronic holism as if these are the duck and the rabbit of selfhood. MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur have all made it very clear that they believe Parfit is mistaken about the nature of the self.[39] Strawson also turns out to disagree with MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur in a different respect: he wrote an article in which he denies having a narrative view of the world at all. Strawson uses his self-avowal to challenge the conception of narrativity of MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur, as well as the exclusiveness of conception of the good life. Strawson's challenge is of particular interest here because it is written in the spirit of pluralism, meaning that (formally speaking) there may not be one way of living the good life. Pluralism about the good life will become important when we will look at the possibility that one's narrative self-understanding may be fractured. The problems posed by Strawson's challenge, as well as some responses to these problems, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

39 Strawson's work on the ontology of selfhood appeared later than the seminal works of MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur, which is why they cannot explicitly claim that Strawson is similarly mistaken.

Chapter 3: Implicit Narrativity

3.1: The problems: triviality and chauvinism

The problems that Galen Strawson posed for the narrativity thesis in his 2004 paper "Against Narrativity" continue to haunt many debates about narrativity today. Although Strawson's article mostly had impact because he flatly denies he has a narrative view of the world, the argument he puts forward is more intricate. Strawson uses an example from Henry James to point to a difference between having an experience of oneself *qua* self and experience of oneself as a human being (a distinction Strawson also made, although rather less explicit, in 'The Self', as discussed in section 2.2). This difference has three general components: (i) there is something that I, as a human being, have done; (ii) I do not feel as if it was *me* who did that; and (iii) I know from first-person experience that I have done this.[40] Strawson's point is that the self, as a feature of our experience, does not necessarily encompass all of our lives. He exploits the space he thus created by presenting two types of people: Episodics and Diachronics. Episodics are more inclined to see their lives in terms of temporally separate episodes, with their selves *qua* selves only present in a single episode, while Diachronics are more inclined to see their lives as a whole. Strawson treats episodicity and diachronicity as character traits representing different kinds of temporal experience, meaning that people are differently endowed with respect to these traits.[41] Moreover, Strawson claims these individual differences between people are morally relevant, meaning that it would be wrong to generalise in ethical discourse from the perspective of a Diachronic to all human beings. As a consequence, Stawson maintains that the Episodic life should be an ethically viable option for people who are endowed with the respective disposition.[42]

---

40 Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity", *Ratio* 17 (2004): 433-434.

41 Note that Strawson's dispositional approach to diachronicity and episodicity means that the difference between Diachronics and Episodics is not a matter of perspective, but a real difference. See also his comment: "if you're Diachronic you're not Episodic and conversely" (page 432).

42 To be more precise, Strawson gives a two-part argument, the first part of which is that the Episodic life and the Diachronic life can both be versions of the good life. The second part of Strawson's argument consists of reasons why the Episodic life may be preferred over the Diachronic life. Considered in isolation, that part of Strawson's discussion is not directly relevant for the current project.

The relation between episodicity and diachronicity on the one hand and narrativity on the other hand is more difficult than it first seems. In a passage that, if read in isolation, looks very straightforward, Strawson suggests that diachronicity is necessary for Narrativity, which implies that Episodics cannot engage in Narrativity.[43] Strawson uses a capital N here to talk about the Narrativity thesis strictly as the idea that we see all of our lives in narrative terms. Not seeing the whole of your life in narrative terms amounts to being non-Narrative for Strawson, even though as a non-Narrative person you may still see parts of your life in narrative terms. What follows from this is that episodicity is compatible with narrativity, even though it is incompatible with Narrativity in Strawson's sense. A further problem here is that Strawson's classification of himself as "relatively Episodic" suggest that episodicity and diachronicity are not dichotomous, but exist along a continuum of some kind. [44] Nonetheless, Strawson expects that Diachronics will tend to see their lives in narrative terms, whereas Episodics will not tend to see their lives in narrative terms.

Strawson uses the distinction between Episodics and Diachronics to argue against what he calls the psychological Narrativity thesis, by which he means the descriptive thesis that all people naturally see their lives in the form of a narrative. If his distinction between Episodics and Diachronics hold, and if episodicity is incompatible with Narrativity, then there is at least one person (Strawson himself) whose existence is a counterexample to the psychological Narrativity thesis.[45] Although Strawson makes an effort to show that the psychological Narrativity thesis is false, at least with respect to Episodics such as himself, Strawson's rejection of the psychological Narrativity thesis serves as a starting point for his attack on his main target, what he calls the ethical Narrativity thesis. Strawson mentions MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur as examples of philosophers who have argued that seeing the whole of your life as a narrative is necessary in order to live the good life. If it is true that we need to see our lives in narrative form to live the good life, then Episodics, who lack Narrativity, are altogether debarred from living good lives. Strawson's objection against the ethical Narrativity thesis is similar to his objection against the psychological Narrativity thesis: it may be true for those pro-Narrativity authors, but it is not true for everyone.[46] Strawson's non-

43 Ibid., 432.

44 Ibid., 433.

45 Ibid., 432-433.

46 Ibid., 435-437.

Narrativity is not some kind of defect that keeps him from living the best possible life he can have, it just means that the good life is something different for him. In other words, Strawson believes that a non-Narrative life is a better life, at least for him, than a Narrative life.

The important point here is that Strawson does not see himself as a deviant who misses out on the good life, but as a person with different character traits who lives, and will continue to live, a different but no less fulfilling life. As Jongepier noted in her 2014 article "Towards a Constitutive Account of Implicit Narrativity", Strawson's position poses a dilemma for narrativists.[47] The first horn of the dilemma emerges from Strawson's claim that there are non-Narrative as well as Narrative persons. An important note here is that Jongepier emphasises that at least some of the people who do not tend to view themselves in connection with past events are psychologically healthy.[48]

If it is true that some psychologically healthy people do not experience themselves as being connected with who they were during past events, suggesting that all humans must see their lives in an explicitly told life story would be needlessly chauvinistic. The second horn of the dilemma would be to accept Strawson's critique that he does not explicitly tell any kind of story about his life as a whole, but to assert instead that people have implicit narratives. The problem with implicit narrativity, though, is that narrativity is in danger of becoming a trivial phenomenon. In an example mentioned by Jongepier, Strawson notes that he has no problem with narrativity if, for instance, the process of making coffee is structured in a narrative order.[49] If narrativity is trivialised to that extent, however, it quickly becomes an empty concept.[50] So, put very briefly, the dilemma posed by Strawson's article is that accounts of narrative identity become either chauvinistic or trivial.

3.2: Implicit narrativity: the neo-Kierkegaardian view and the self-constitutition view

47 Fleur Jongepier, "Towards a Constitutive Account of Implicit Narrativity", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15 (2016): 51-52.

48 Ibid., 52.

49 Strawson, "Against Narrativity", 439.

50 Jongepier, "Towards a Constitutive Account", 52 cites John Lippitt as saying that for implicit narrativity "the threat of emptiness looms large".

Ever since the publication of Strawson's article narrativists have tried to develop an account of narrativity that avoids the threats of both chauvinism and triviality. Such accounts often proceed from the observation that, even though most people do not explicitly engage in constructing their autobiographies, we normally have an unarticulated sense of ourselves in storied form. In that case, our narratives are not explicit and told, but implicit and lived. There are (at least) two different approaches that can be taken here, which will be discussed in turn in this section. The first approach, which has been taken by several contemporary Kierkegaard scholars, takes the phenomenology of self-experience as its starting point in order to argue that (1) our self-experience is diachronic in an unarticulated but implicitly present way, and (2) the diachronicity of our experience of ourselves as selves is ethically relevant, meaning that Episodics like Strawson, if they are not mistaken about their self-experience, are really lacking in ethical agency.

The neo-Kierkegaardian view

One example of an error theory along phenomenological lines is given by Anthony Rudd in *Self, Value, and Narrative.* According to Rudd, there are two related mistakes in the reasoning of opponents of narrativity. The first mistake is that they presume that narratives "are stories that only exist when they are told. Without narration there is no narrative."[51] The second mistake is that narratives supposedly only exist after they have been told, meaning that narratives are stories about pre-narrative facts and events. To counter these mistakes in understanding, Rudd argues that narrativists like MacIntyre intended to say that narratives are not stories told about our lives, but rather are lived stories. Because we live out these stories rather than tell them explicitly, Rudd suggests that often we are unaware of the narrative structure of our lives. For instance, me working on my thesis now is embedded in ever-extending larger stories of me completing my thesis, completing my Philosophy degree, starting a career, and making a life for myself. If I do not tell a story that connects me working on my thesis with the career I hope to have, this should not be taken to imply that there is no narrative structure to the path I hope to take. Instead, according to Rudd a narrative structure should be seen as implicitly formed by one's actions rather than explicitly told.

51 Anthony Rudd, Self*, Value and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179. Rudd has taken this citation directly from the work of Peter Lamarque, one of his opponents.

There is a difficulty present in this view of which Rudd is well aware. One might say that the author of a story has control over the actions over the story's characters in a way in which the characters have not. Therefore, it seems impossible that one can be both the author of one's life story as well as its main character. According to Rudd, however, this criticism does not apply to the kind of narrativity that narrativists like MacIntyre appeal to. Rudd cites MacIntyre as saying that "we are never more (and often much less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy we do live as we please".[52] MacIntyre's point here is twofold: as social beings, we find ourselves living among others who have an influence on our narratives, meaning that we are never the sole author of our own narratives, and most of us are confronted with many situations in life over which we have only limited control. Therefore, the idea of a personal narrative being whatever story we please is simply not applicable to MacIntyre.

A related difficulty, raised by those who favour self-acceptance over self-shaping, is whether the narrative view does not overstate the extent to which we are in control of our lives.[53] Although Rudd believes that this concern of hubris is legitimate, he believes that narrative accounts like MacIntyre's are not hubristic. Rudd uses the same reasons to argue for this point: we are co-authors at best, and often less than that. What is interesting about this problem, though, is how Rudd characterises agency. On Rudd's view, and he follows both MacIntyre and Ricoeur here, we do not have the power to decide what happens to us other than through making it happen, but we have the power to incorporate events into our narrative framework. We can do this by, in MacIntyre's terminology, making actions intelligible in light of previous events, or in the language of Ricoeur by attributing meaning or significance to what happens to us. Rudd reminds us that, on MacIntyre's account, intelligible action is more primitive than so-called 'basic' actions, which means that we normally see our lives in a narrative of some form, even if that structure may be mostly implicit.

Although radical non-narrativity at this point is excluded, there is still the option that we see our lives in rather trivial micro-narratives. For Rudd, however, this is not a viable option. In his article "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity", Rudd argues that the same kind of

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 178-179.

problem that besets 'basic' actions also makes micro-narratives untenable.[54] It is difficult to understand episodes like someone else making coffee if we do not operate under the assumption that the coffee-maker herself has an understanding of this action that makes it intelligible. This argument extends to decisions like taking a new job, moving to a new town or a new country, or continuing or abandoning a romantic relationship, which Rudd avows he does not make against some more or less explicit sense of his life as a whole. The same holds true for future events that will be incorporated into one's ongoing narrative. According to Rudd, it is precisely because the past continues to live on in me that we may worry about the future's impingements on the past me. Our narratives cannot be seen as separate micro-narratives, neither in terms of their domain nor in terms of when they take place, but must part of an inextricable, even if mostly unarticulated, whole.

One example of what a phenomenological account of implicit narrativity may look like has been given by Patrick Stokes in his article "What's Missing in Episodic Selfhood?". The motivation behind Stokes' account is a tension in Strawson's work. On the one hand, Strawson points out that there are individual differences in terms of people's experience of themselves as rather more Episodic or Diachronic, while arguing that neither option is ethically preferable over the other. On the other hand, Strawson has developed an ontology of the self that is approached more accurately by episodic self-experience.[55] This seems to suggest that diachronic self-experience is some kind of illusion, which may be harmful or benign, while episodic self-experience is not. If Strawson truly wants to be ethically neutral with respect to episodicity and diachronicity, then, Stokes argues, he needs to level the playing field by avowing an account of diachronic self-experience that does not treat diachronicity as an illusion. If Strawson cannot do that, then he should not pretend to be neutral between episodicity and diachronicity, and embrace the claim that episodic self-experience is to be preferred over diachronic self-experience (an option that, given his focus on embracing experiential diversity, would be very unappealing for Strawson).

---

54 Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity", *Inquiry* 50 (2007): 543-544. Rudd presents a truncated version of the same argument in *Self, Value and Narrative,* 183-184.

55 Stokes, Patrick. "What's Missing in Episodic Self-Experience?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17 (2010): 120. On page 127 Stokes notes that Strawson has denied that there are any causal links between his ontology of the self and episodic self-experience. However, as Stokes points out, even without a causal link there still is a sense in which diachronic self-experience gets it wrong and episodic self-experience get it, more or less, right.

Stokes realises that, as a self-avowed Episodic, Strawson is probably not in the right position to develop a phenomenological account of diachronic self-experience. However, Strawson needs an ethically neutral account that takes diachronic self-experience seriously in order to maintain his ecumenical attitude. To push Strawson further on this point, Stokes develops an ethically non-neutral account of diachronic self-experience, largely based on Kierkegaard's work. [56]The point of developing an ethically non-neutral account is to suggest that Episodics like Strawson are really missing out on something. If Strawson does not want to accept the consequences of Stokes' Kierkegaardian account, then, Stokes argues, Strawson will need a different account of diachronic self-experience. In the absence of a different account of diachronic self-experience, Stokes' account leaves Strawson with two options: either dismiss diachronic self-experience as illusory or accept it as normative. Neutrality, Stokes contends, is not a suitable option.

Having set up the stage for his account, Stokes uses Kierkegaard's concept of contemporaneity to answer the obvious question how it is possible to experience something directly from which you are temporally removed. Contemporaneity, according to Kierkegaard, means to experience the past as if it is the present. To experience the past as the present, it is not enough to have the kind of memory of past events that Strawson described. There are at least two features of contemporaneity that need to be added to Strawson's description: direct moral appeal and agent-directedness.[57] Direct moral appeal means that an event requires an ethical response from an agent. If a stranger asks me for some money, that request has a direct moral appeal in the sense that I can feel I have to respond to that request somehow. Moral appeal would not be direct if I feel like I do not have to respond in any way, for instance in the case of a TV commercial asking me to donate money to a charity organisation. The other feature of contemporaneity missing in Strawson's recollection of past events, agent-directedness, means that I have to feel as if a moral appeal specifically targets me. If I am with a group and someone walks up to my group and asks: "Can you give me directions to the nearest bus stop?", I can reasonably believe that she is addressing the group rather than me personally, meaning that I do not have to respond. However, if I experience the past like the present, then, unlike Strawson's intellectualised awareness of the consequences of past actions, I feel like I need to respond to the appeal these past events have on me. As a

56 Ibid., 121-122.

57 Ibid., 131-132.

consequence, I also experience the co-existence of the past me and the present me, which is what makes my self-experience in contemporaneity diachronic.

Stokes does not refer to narrativity in his account of diachronic self-experience. However, that may well be an artefact of using Kierkegaard's terminology. Experiencing the past *as if* it is the present normally does not lead us to mistake the past for the present. The temporal distance between the past event and the present moment remains in memorising past events, but with it comes an acute awareness of the appeal that past events have on who one is now. This seems to imply that in Kierkegaardian contemporaneity there is some kind of untold story, an implicit narrative that connects a past event with our current selves through the ethical significance of the past event. If there is no such narrative, then impingements from past events become unintelligible and may start to appear random, raising the question if the moral appeal of these events is genuine or the imagination of an overactive conscience.

Although the account so far has some descriptive appeal, Stokes points out that contemporaneity, on Kierkegaard's account, is not intended as a mere description of a psychological phenomenon.[58] According to Kierkegaard, as ethical agents we are required to develop an attitude of inwardness, meaning that we relate to our entire past in terms of contemporaneity. Someone who does not relate to a part of her past in terms of inwardness is lacking in ethical agency. Therefore, a person like Strawson, who does not identify with past versions of himself, is really missing out in an ethical sense: he does not stand in the right relation with his past to respond appropriately to past events as an ethical agent. If Strawson wants to avoid this charge, he has to come up with a different and ethically neutral account of self-experience.

The self-constitution view

The neo-Kierkegaardian view of implicit narrativity is not without its problems. In her discussion of the responses of Rudd and Stokes to Strawson, Jongepier observes that both Strawson and his opponents are interested in the phenomenology of the self perceived as a self. [59]For this reason, narrativists like Rudd and Stokes try to come up with an account that

58 Ibid., 131.

59 Jongepier, "Towards a Constitutive Account", 53-55.

specifies what it is like for us to experience ourselves over time as the same person. However, in spite of these attempts, Jongepier finds that it remains difficult to see how a diachronic *self* can possibly be experienced in our synchronic experiences. More importantly, because these accounts do not take Strawson's distinction between his experience of himself as a human being and of himself as a self seriously, they imply that deeply Episodic people like Strawson are either mistaken about their self-experience or are really disbarred from the good life.[60] In either case, Episodics are unlikely to be receptive towards the neo-Kierkegaardian view of narrativity.

A different appeal to implicit narrativity was made by Marya Schechtman. In *Staying Alive,* Schechtman reiterates her criticism of psychological approaches to personal identity that frame personal identity in terms of relations between time-slices. She suggests that these claims are made because the problem of personal identity is conceived as a problem of reidentification rather than characterisation.[61] Instead, she suggests that we think about personal identity as a relation between persons and psychological elements or actions. This would lead to an understanding of our personal identity in narrative terms. However, as Schechtman elaborates in an article written as a direct response to Strawson's "Against Narrativity", there is a range of different positions with respect to how much of a person's narrative is made explicit.[62] Schechtman herself maintains that narrativity is an automatic process through which the self is constituted, using knowledge and personal memory that largely remains implicit. Instead of being an explicitly told story, there is an autobiographical

60 See Anthony Rudd, "Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance", *Inquiry* 48 (2005): 421 for the claim that the distinction between persons, or human beings, and selves is only useful in atypical situations such as people suffering from severe brain damage. However, as mentioned previously, Jongepier points out that there are psychologically healthy people who do not connect with their past and do not see some of their past as part of themselves. While it may be relatively easy to accept, conceptually speaking, that there may be some severely mentally ill people who are incapable of living the good life, suggesting that a certain group of psychologically healthy people does not have access to the good life seems chauvinistic.

61 Marya Schechtman, *Staying Alive,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 99-100. In comparison with Rudd's phenomenological view it should be noted here that Rudd denies the distinction between reidentification and characterisation because on his account the substantiality of the self and the development of a character's narrative mutually presuppose one another. See Anthony Rudd, "Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance", *Inquiry* 48 (2005), 427.

62 Marya Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View".In: Narrative *and Understanding Persons,* ed. Daniel Hutto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159-161.

narrative that is expressed only in part, but that functions as a lens through which we view the world. This is what Schechtman has called her 'Narrative Self-Constitution View'.[63]

Schechtman's intention with the Narrative Self-Constitution View is to augment a neo-Lockean understanding of the self by explaining relations between the same person at different times in terms of sameness rather than similarity.[64] This means that the person who wrote the preceding paragraph of this thesis yesterday does not just closely resemble me, but that, in a deep sense, he *is* me. If we conceive of the self only in terms of similarity, then we cannot account for the fact that others conceive of us as being the same person over time and respond to us correspondingly. Schechtman's criticism of neo-Lockean views echoes MacIntyre's concerns about our responsiveness to the imputation of personal identity. Nonetheless, Schechtman believes that the view of narrativists like MacIntyre, who insist on the narrative unity of a life, is too strong. Schechtman believes we must be aware of ourselves as persons because we have complex social practices that become unintelligible for us without such a sense of ourselves. However, given that a part of our narrative remains implicit, there seems to be no room in Schechtman's account for narrativity to provide an ethical evaluation of our life as a whole that encompasses all of our experiences.

Although Schechtman to an extent follows MacIntyre, she is responsive to the line of criticism advanced by Strawson. In light of "Against Narrativity", Schechtman revises her account in one important respect: she distinguishes between persons and selves.[65] On Schechtman's view, we are aware of ourselves as being the same person throughout our lives, even in remembering actions we have performed that we do not identify with. Selfhood, however, is a narrower and richer class that includes identification with or empathic access to one's past memories. To make the difference clear, Schechtman provides the example of regretting the purchase of a sports car: I may not identify with the purchase made by my previous self, but I am well aware that I will have to pay off the car. The notion of personhood has the same duration as a human life, which accounts for the imputation of personal identity, but, following Strawson, selfhood may be more brief in duration. According to Schechtman, other accounts of narrativity, including her original formulation of the Narrative Self-

63 Schechtman, *Staying Alive,* 99-103.

64 Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival", 162-166.

65 Ibid., 171-175.

Constitution View, have conflated personhood and selfhood in Schechtman's sense, to which Strawson has rightly objected.

Schechtman's revision of the Narrative Self-Constitution view does not, however, mean that she accepts Strawson's account without question. Schechtman still maintains that it is *prima facie* more desirable to have a self-narrative that is coextensive with one's person-narrative.[66] She qualifies this statement by adding that this may not always be desirable and that there may be cases in which it is preferable to experience a radical affective break with the past or with the future. Schechtman also explicitly states that those who do not extend their narrative necessarily have worse lives.[67] Schechtman makes room for the possibility that self-narratives and person-narratives can be coextensive by pointing out a distinction between the phenomenology of the self and the metaphysics of the self in Strawson's work. Schechtman notes that, although metaphysically speaking selves last for only a couple of seconds, Strawson allows for the possibility that selves feature in experience for a longer time. Therefore it is still possible that our experiential self lasts as long as we do as persons. The lifespan of our experiential self may not be obvious, though. Schechtman points out that, phenomenologically speaking, it is not clear where one self stops and another self begins. Therefore, selves may have parts that lie dormant and are waiting to be expressed or to be brought out by the right context. There may, in other words, be implicit elements to our phenomenological self-experience. As a consequence, our phenomenological selves do not succeed one another as neatly as the metaphysical selves in Strawson's Pearl View.[68] Conversely, though, the emphasis on selves having implicit parts means that not everything about our lives has to be made explicit in order for our selves to have the right kind of structure for ethical agency.

66 Ibid., 176. Note that Schechtman claims that people have the ability to extend their self-narrative through activities like looking at photographs and going to reunions to become more affectively engaged with our own past. This claim implies that people who do not have such a connection with their own past or future do not simply have the wrong temporal disposition, as Strawson would have it.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 177-178.

Another disagreement between Schechtman and Strawson can be distilled from Schechtman's discussion of diachronic unity in *Staying Alive.*[69] According to Strawson, we can experience ourselves as a unity throughout time by applying some kind of principle of organisation to our otherwise rather gappy self-experience. Schechtman, however, opposes the view that there are individual atoms that are brought together in some kind of unity. Instead, she suggests that the diachronic unity that characterises persons precedes any division of a person's life into distinct episodes. The notion of a self is therefore not more basic than the notion of a person, but instead is an abstraction taken from the person's life as a whole. In arguing for the diachronic unity of personhood Schechtman stresses the developmental nature of the unity of persons. Schechtman uses the notion of organised development to replace Strawson's notion of gradual change to emphasise the typical growth of a person.[70] Organised development provides human lives with a kind of trajectory that is similar to a life story. Indeed, Schechtman characterises infancy, maturity, and dementia as the beginning, middle, and end of one's life story, arguing that most people have an implicit sense of their lives along those lines. Although the notion of typicality suggests that Schechtman provides a descriptive thesis here that may be true of many people and false of some, one may wonder whether the trivial sense of narrativity Strawson ascribes to himself is thick enough to constitute a person with ethical agency on Schechtman's account. In other words, on Schechtman's view there may be complex practices that require a thicker sense of personhood than Strawson provides.

Conclusion

Strawson's self-avowal that he does not have a narrative view of his own life led to two lines of response that both emphasised how narratives are not necessarily explicit and told, but may be implicit and lived. As responses to the problems of triviality and chauvinism, however, both are quite different. Rudd and Stokes both maintain that there is something seriously wrong with Strawson's position. Rudd believes that there is no other way to view even trivial decisions like going for coffee than to see them in a light that will make these decisions intelligible, which culminates in seeing one's life as a whole. If this holds as a general point rather than something that is just true of Rudd (as it seems to be intended), then this assertion implies that Strawson is mistaken about his own self-experience. Stokes maintains that

69 Schechtman, *Staying Alive,* 102-103.

70 Ibid., 107.

Episodics like Strawson miss out by lacking the appropriate ethical agency to take responsibility for their own past actions. Schechtman, on the other hand, allows for the possibility that people like Strawson, who do not have a narrative view of their lives, can have an equally good life. She seems to imply, however, that this is the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, Schechtman points out that we have some control over how connected we are to our own past, meaning that our self-narratives are not *merely* given, but also in part a consequence of our own decisions. Having control over our own narratives allows for the possibility, noted by Schechtman, that one can decide that it would be better not to ruminate over past events or think about future events, even if that implies not being connected to one's past or future self. The space Schechtman allows here will become important in Part 2 when we will consider FNSU.

One important point to take away from this discussion is the distinction between self-narratives and person-narratives, or between selves and persons more generally. The distinction between selves and persons plays a crucial role in Strawson's claim that he can remember past events without experiencing these events as if they happened to his current self. This distinction was endorsed by Schechtman, but explicitly rejected by Rudd, who maintains that persons and selves are coextensive in the lives of psychologically healthy adults. This discussion is important for FNSU, since Rudd's position does not allow for the possibility that self-understanding is fractured. For this reason, examining narrative selfhood and, more specifically,the question whether *the* self is narrative, will be useful to set up Part 2. This examination will be the focus of Chapter 4. I will first discuss Zahavi's criticism of narrative accounts of selfhood, which he juxtaposes with his own understanding of minimal selfhood. I will then proceed to discuss Rudd's metaphysical understanding of selfhood, according to which narrativity, selfhood, and personal identity are all connected. Outlining these two accounts will provide a useful vantage point to consider the question whether there is a sense of self more minimal than narrative selfhood.

Chapter 4: Different Perspectives on the Self

4.1: The minimal self

Dan Zahavi has argued in several places that the narrative conception of selfhood, like the substantive conception of selfhood, does not capture a fundamental aspect of the self.[71] To contrast his view on selfhood from the views he attributes to the narrativists, Zahavi argues that there is a notion of selfhood that is more fundamental, which he calls the experiential self.[72] Because Zahavi takes the experiential self to be the minimal form of selfhood, it is also known as the minimal self.[73] As Zahavi clarifies in the second section of his article "Self and Other", his goal is not to develop an account of selfhood that rivals the accounts of the narrativists, but instead to argue for a multivocal conception of selfhood. This approach reflects his understanding that selfhood has multiple dimensions that cannot be captured by a univocal concept of the self. In line with this approach, Zahavi does not seek to argue that his approach to selfhood should replace narrative selfhood, but instead captures an aspect of selfhood that remains outside the scope of narrative accounts. Therefore, Zahavi's arguments, if successful, would show that we need both minimal and narrative selfhood as notions to understand most fully what it means to have or to be a self.

Although Zahavi is mainly concerned with developing a notion of selfhood to complement the narrative self, this does not mean that he can accept accounts of narrative selfhood at face value. Zahavi notes in his book *Self and Other* that he "would oppose […] the claim that *the* self is a narratively constructed entity and that *every* access to oneself and to the selves of

71 Most notable is Dan Zahavi, "Self and Other: The Limits of Narrative Understanding". In: *Narrative and Understanding Persons,* ed. Daniel Hutto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 179-202. See also Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 51-62. Note that his book and his article both have the title 'Self and Other'.

72 Zahavi, "Self and Other", 185-194.

73 Perhaps most obvious is Dan Zahavi, "The Minimal Self and the Narrative Self", in: *The Embodied Self: Dimensions, Coherence, and Disorders,* ed. Thomas Fuchs (Stuttgart: Schattauer, 2010): 3-20. I will use the term 'minimal self' in what follows, mainly because it provides a useful connection with ideas from outside Zahavi's phenomenological tradition that there are minimal conditions of selfhood. These connections will be made more clear in the subsequent paragraphs.

others is mediated by narratives."[74] The reason for this opposition is that Zahavi believes narrative selfhood is usually understood as a construction or an achievement rather than a given. If it is true that *the* self is a construction, then what follows is that there can be no self that precedes constructive activity. Moreover, Zahavi points to a tendency among narrativists like Ricoeur to maintain that this constructive activity is performed through reflection, meaning that there would be no room for pre-reflective selfhood if *the* self is narrative. However, Zahavi himself maintains (as will become clearer in the subsequent paragraphs) that there is a sense in which selfhood is pre-reflectively given. Therefore, in order to create space for his account of selfhood alongside narrative selfhood, Zahavi needs to conceive of narrative selfhood as something that captures an aspect of the self rather than the self in general. Zahavi's understanding that there is no one univocal conception of the self, but multiple complementary conceptions of the self, serves precisely this argumentative purpose.

In order to situate his discussion of the minimal self in "Self and Other", Zahavi provides contrasts between three different conceptions of selfhood: the self as a Cartesian ego, the narrative self, and the minimal self.[75] Zahavi points out that the narrativists called our attention to the temporal dimension of selfhood, an aspect that remained out of focus when the self was considered as an unchanging ego. Zahavi then applies the same strategy of arguing that there is an aspect of selfhood that remains out of focus. Zahavi's main objection against narrative accounts of selfhood is that these accounts leave the experiential dimension of selfhood unexamined.[76] According to Zahavi, it is a brute fact about humans and other animals that they experience things in a certain way. Formally speaking, what is needed for such an experience is that there is someone involved in having that experience. To put it differently, there are no experiences without an experiencer. Zahavi maintains that the experiential dimension of selfhood is a *sine qua non* aspect of what it means to be a self: nothing that does not have this subjective character can be considered to be a self.

Zahavi's account of the relation between experience and selfhood is refined in *Self and Other.* Here, Zahavi contrasts his own position with two varieties of representationalism: self-

74 Dan Zahavi, *Self* and *Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74. Italics by Zahavi.

75 Although present in "Self and Other", this contrast is made more clearly in Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (London: Routledge, 2008, 2012), 222-227.

76 Zahavi, "Self and Other", 191-194.

representationalism and higher-order representationalism.[77] Higher-order representationalists see selfhood as something completely transparent, something we look through to see the world and which can only be grasped by inferring its existence from our ordinary experience. Zahavi argues against this position that generally we do not look inwards and detect our own mental states, but instead our mental states are given to us in experience in a certain way. With respect to selfhood, this would mean that we do not infer the existence of our selves, but that we are given to ourselves as subjects. In other words, our selves are intrinsically present in experience. The intrinsic presence of selfhood in experience is similarly maintained by self-representationalists. However, they apply a principle to the self Zahavi calls the Transitivity Principle: a state's being conscious involves one's noninferentially being conscious of that state (e.g. hearing involves noninferentially being conscious of a sound). Zahavi argues against this position that generally speaking with respect to experience there is a divide between what appears in experience and to whom it appears, or between object and subject. If the Transitivity Principle were to apply to the self, this divide would be crossed, turning the self into an object that is somehow simultaneously given to itself and present in experience as an object. Zahavi points out that there is an option that self-representationalists have overlooked that does not cross this divide. This is the position to which Zahavi himself ascribes. For Zahavi, the self is noninferentially present in experience, but as a formal feature *of* lived experience rather than as some kind of mental object that features *in* experience.

Zahavi can be taken to argue that selfhood is a *merely* formal or logical feature of experience, a reading that can potentially be used to accuse him of empty formalism. In a review of *Self and Other,* Philip Walsh remarks that "[a]t times, I found myself conceiving of his minimal selfhood as a sort of empty container: the "field" or "space" of experience in which specific experiential episodes play out."[78] Walsh continues to point out that Zahavi has disavowed this view several times in his book. Zahavi seeks to avoid the view that there is a pure and empty field of experience where experiences arise and pass. This means that even if we can distinguish between subject and object, there is no duality of minimal self and experiential content. Zahavi's notion of minimal selfhood is formal, but it is not transcendental in a neo-

77 Zahavi, *Self and Other,* 37-41. Figure 1, printed on page 38, provides a helpful depiction of the different options Zahavi is discussing here.

78 Philip Walsh, "Dan Zahavi: *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy and Shame*," Husserl Studies 32 (2016), 77.

Kantian sense. Instead, we should conceive of Zahavi's notion of minimal selfhood phenomenologically: it is an invariant feature of experience of which we are pre-reflectively aware, but it does not transcend experience.

Although Zahavi's notion of minimal selfhood seems rather thin, it is thicker than Galen Strawson's conception of selfhood mentioned in section 2.2. Unlike Strawson, Zahavi argues in *Self and Other* that diachronic unity is a property of minimal selfhood.[79] The source of disagreement between Zahavi and Strawson is that Strawson understands self-experience in terms of experiential selfhood instead of vice versa, which Zahavi believes is a mistake. Zahavi's compact formulation at this point requires some unpacking. Strawson uses experiential selfhood, our experience of a self perceived as a self, to argue that there is a thing to which our experience of our self corresponds. If the self is such a phenomenally accessible mental thing, then interruptions of experience such as deep sleep would reflect a division of the self into several different things. One consequence of this division into temporally disparate selves is that it raises the question why these selves would be identical, a question Strawson answered by pointing to relations of similarity. Zahavi's criticism of Strawson here is that he uses a mistaken conception of identity to answer the question of personal identity. As Zahavi notes, Husserl had pointed out that an interrupted tone is not the same as the tone that follows the interruption, even if the two are qualitatively identical. Husserl maintained that interruptions do not similarly present us with separate selves that happen to be qualitatively identical. Husserl's observation seems to imply that selves are not the same kind of thing as are sounds, which is precisely the objection of Zahavi against self-representationalism.

If Strawson is seen as a self-representationalist, then Zahavi's criticism amounts to Strawson needlessly seeking identity criteria for the self as an object of experience rather than the subject.[80] Zahavi's arguments against self-representationalism certainly seem to apply to his disagreement with Strawson as well. The relevant difference between selves and sounds is

79 Zahavi, *Self and Other,* 71-74.

80 Strawson's position does not neatly fall into one of the three positions on phenomenal selfhood Zahavi outlined in *Self and Other.* Some of Strawson's observations, such as his three-brains example, can be read as inferring the existence of a self. However, I find it difficult to see how a sense of a mental self can be inferential, even if Strawson does use inferential reasoning to back up his conception of selfhood.

that according to Zahavi the Transitivity Principle does not apply to selves, meaning that selves are not objects of experience, and therefore identity criteria that pertain to objects do not necessarily pertain to selves. However, if identity criteria pertaining to objects are not the right identity criteria for Zahavi to ground the diachronic unity of personal identity, how does he ground personal identity? To answer this question, consider that for Zahavi the minimal self is not a thing, but an aspect of the way in which experience manifests itself. Zahavi argues that past and present experiences manifest themselves in the same way. For instance, my memory of yesterday's train incident is subjectively available to me, just as me witnessing that train incident was yesterday. Zahavi uses this continuity of the way in which experiences are available to me to argue that interruptions do not divide the minimal self into several different selves. Subjectivity as an invariant feature of experience is sufficient for Zahavi to provide minimal selfhood with diachronic unity. Relations of similarity between temporally different episodes are therefore simply unnecessary to ground personal identity.

Zahavi's position on minimal selfhood has implications for his view on narrative selfhood. As Zahavi points out, narrativity is either superimposed on a preëxisting self or transforms our perception in such a way that a self is constituted or constructed.[81] If *the* self is narrative, this would leave us with the question how we should characterise the experiences of prelinguistic infants and how their perception is transformed. One may appeal to the distinction between subjectivity and selfhood (or between persons and selves, which appears to be equivalent) to tackle the first part of this question.[82] Zahavi believes, however, that this is only terminologically different from distinguishing between different aspects of selfhood. On the other hand, if prelinguistic infants are not considered to have full-blown selfhood because they lack the capacity for narrativity, then an unbridgeable duality between prelinguistic and linguistic creatures emerges. To avoid this duality, Zahavi maintains that selfhood consists not in the content of experience but in the mode of presentation.[83] This means that minimal selfhood as experience's subjectivity remains unchanged as we progress from prelinguistic to

81 Zahavi, *Self and Other,* 60-62.

82 Schechtman takes this approach in *Staying Alive,* mainly to respond to the consideration that imputations of personal identity also are made of prelinguistic infants. This is not an issue that Zahavi raises, though.

83 Zahavi, Self and Other, 62.

linguistic beings. Therefore, according to Zahavi we need an account of minimal selfhood in addition to an account of narrative selfhood, regardless of what the latter amounts to.

4.2: The narrative self

Anthony Rudd has explicitly connected narrativity, selfhood, and personal identity in his article "Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance". Rudd begins by considering Cartesian and Lockean conceptions of personal identity, which he believes both have a common flaw: they conceive of the relation between a substance and its properties as an external relation.[84] As a consequence, there seems to be no other way to understand personal identity than either as an ephemeral substance that remains the same even if all its properties change, or as a bundle of properties that have psychological connectedness. However, if the relation between mental substance and its properties in the case of selfhood is considered as an internal relation, this opens up new possibilities for conceptions of selfhood.[85] An internal relation between a mental substance and its properties means that the properties are constitutive of the substance. One implication of this conception is that a property cannot leave a substance without that substance suffering from identity loss, meaning that thought experiments like Parfit's Teletransporter would not lead to a retention of personal identity.

The problems surrounding personal identity are concerned with more than just relations between substances and properties. As Rudd notes, Butler already argued against Locke that one cannot define the self in terms of memories, because what matters is that these are *my* memories.[86] Therefore, Rudd believes that selfhood cannot be understood without applying a first-person perspective. According to Rudd, the problem of personal identity is unique (rather than an example of problems of identity more generally) precisely because we have this first-person perspective. At this point, it is possible to distinguish between persons and selves, a distinction Rudd notes was made by Lynne Baker, and argue that personal identity pertains primarily to persons. Although Rudd considers this perspective to be useful when discussing some fringe cases, such as patients suffering from brain damage, he believes that typically

84 Rudd, "Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance", 414-417

85 The reference to 'mental substance' may seem otiose here, but Rudd's conception of mental substance will become clearer after more of his position has been presented. For now, it suffices to say that Rudd clearly distinguishes himself from Cartesian metaphysics by denying on page 415 that the self is a sort of extentionless (sic) point.

86 Ibid., 417.

adult personhood is understood precisely in terms of full-fledged selfhood.[87] Therefore, the relation of constitution that Rudd uses to describe the relation between mental substance and properties is not a relation that pertains to persons, but to selves.

Having created space for the possibility of an internal relation between mental substance and properties, Rudd goes on to point out what exactly he believes this relation to be. The notion he uses to describe this relation is the notion of expression, meaning that properties are expressive of mental substance.[88] As Rudd argues, we do not ordinarily infer a person's pain from their shrieks or their sadness from their crying. Instead, we directly experience that other person as being in pain or sad, and we consider their behaviour to be a natural expression of such mental states. According to Rudd, this observation is best reflected by a metaphysics in which these behaviours are not linked to mental substance in a contingent causal fashion, but instead are an integral part of it. In other words, expressions of mental states are taken to be part of these mental states. Moreover, the occurrence of mental states like fear are themselves expressive of character dispositions like timidity. Rudd finishes off this hierarchical nexus of expression relations by suggesting that character dispositions are in turn expressive of selves. However, Rudd claims the self takes priority over its constituent states. Without the self and its commitments and values as background, Rudd claims, there would be no occurrent mental states. Conversely though, the self cannot exist without constituent mental states. To explain how this is possible, Rudd suggests that the self is "always ready" and committed to a set of actions and values.[89] Rudd insists that on this view the self is neither reducible to the states through which it is expressed nor wholly distinct from them.

At this point, however, one remaining question is how expressions of the kind outlined by Rudd become manifest in real time. According to Rudd, the only way these expressions of the self can be understood is through narrative. [90]The move Rudd makes here is reminiscent of MacIntyre's contention that personal identity and narrative presuppose one another. Rudd holds that "[t]he substantiality of the self cannot be understood in isolation of the

87 Ibid., 421.

88 Ibid., 422-426.

89 Ibid., 426. Quotation marks by Rudd. Unfortunately, Rudd spends very little time developing this particular point, but his remark here seems to echo Taylor's remark that selves simply do not have the kind of neutrality with which many personal identity theorists treat it.

90 Ibid., 428-430.

development of a plot in which that character is involved. But neither can such a plot make sense without presupposing something like the expressive model of the substantial Self."[91] By taking this position Rudd explicitly rejects Ricoeur's distinction between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, as well as Schechtman's distinction between the reidentification problem and the characterisation problem.[92] In other words, a narrative plot matters not merely to understand who one is as a person, but also to express the stability of one's character. Unlike MacIntyre, Rudd does not argue that the notion of a person is an abstraction, but instead argues that there is a mental substance underlying the stability of one's character. However, Rudd does follow Macintyre in holding that one's personal identity cannot be understood in isolation of a narrative.

With respect to the ontology of selfhood, Rudd clarifies towards the end of his 2005 article that his account is, in a sense, Kantian.[93] Rudd notes Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal selfhood and suggests that Kant should not be taken to defend the existence of two different selves, but instead that the phenomenal self is how the noumenal self is expressed under the aspect of time. Put differently, there is an atemporal substance that is expressed temporally and which we can only understand as it is expressed (i.e. in the form of a narrative). Phenomenologically speaking, our access to our selves (and, by extension, to the selves of others) is therefore limited by the way in which we structure our experience. This is clearly different from a radical constructivist view in which there is no self other than what is being constructed in a narrative. Rudd is careful, however, to avoid what he calls a Leibnizian position in which expressions of selfhood are simply making manifest the potentialities contained inside all along.[94] Rudd argues, following MacIntyre, that such a view fails to account for our interdependence and the social and environmental challenges that we face during our lifetime. Diachronic self-expression can therefore not be reduced to an atemporal substance.

---

91 Ibid., 427. Capital S by Rudd.

92 Ibid., 427.

93 Ibid., 432. In this respect Rudd's view is the converse view of Strawson's ontology. See footnote 7.

94 Ibid., 428-429.

If there is a gap between the phenomenal self and the noumenal self, then one implication is that the noumenal self is not knowable as it is. Rudd indeed maintains that our narratives do not capture the noumenal self in its entirety.[95] However, that may seem to open up the possibility that there are multiple conceptions of the self that can augment one another, only one of which is the narrative self. This is a possibility that Rudd explicitly rejects. Although narrativity is limited, according to Rudd there is no way we can understand others or ourselves except through narrative. In this respect, the option of a multivocal conception of the self as Zahavi suggested is not an option for Rudd.

Even though diachronic self-expression cannot be reduced to an atemporal substance, there seems to be a necessary connection between Rudd's account of narrativity in connection with his understanding of the metaphysics of selfhood. Even an incomplete expression of a substance comes closest to the reality it aims to express through presupposing a unified whole. In that sense, narratives would be unified by virtue of expressing the unity of the self about which they are narratives. Possibly this is one reason why Rudd suggests that even trivial decisions are played out against the background of his life as a whole. If this interpretation holds up, then the unity of one's narrative identity is an essential ingredient of Rudd's philosophy.

95 Ibid., 432.

PART 2: FRACTURED NARRATIVE SELF-UNDERSTANDING, STRONG NARRATIVITY, AND WELL-BEING

Chapter 5: The Concept of FNSU

What does it mean for a person's self-understanding to be fractured? What is it like to have Fractured Narrative Self-Understanding (henceforth: FNSU)? For an illustration that I hope will help to make this experience more vivid, consider the following exchange between Louis Theroux and former Scientology member Jeff Hawkins, taken from the documentary *My Scientology Movie* (play time: 1:22:28 – 1:23:46):

> *THEROUX: Were, were they* (hesitant or unwilling Scientology followers, SvB) *kept against their will, would you say?*
>
> *HAWKINS: All of the windows and doors were barred and there was a security guard at the door, so I would call that against their will.*
>
> *THEROUX: But if they wanted to badly enough, it's hard not to feel they could have made a run for it.*
>
> *HAWKINS: Well, yes. Yes. And this is something that people don't understand about that environment. I mean, take the... take my case. I finally decided to turn my back on the whole subject and leave. I had to walk away from a 35-year commitment, my wife, who I loved very much... all of the friends I had in the world were at that Int Base* (a colloquial name for the Scientology head quarters, SvB). *A person has to be so desperate to just turn their back on everything and say: "I don't care about all that. I have to leave this place because it's just too oppressive," and walk out into a world that is just totally foreign and where they don't know anybody. They don't know the rules, they don't know how to get a job, they don't know how to get a bank account. You know... it's a foreign world that they have to go out and somehow cope with. Alone. And people say: "why don't they just walk out?" Well, that's why! Because in essence it's a kind of a suicide. You have to say: "my life is over, and I'm walking out of my life and into a totally different life".*

There is much about experiencing FNSU that is revealed in what Hawkins is saying. Perhaps most telling is his allusion to suicide, made to illustrate his going from one life to a totally different life. The theme of dying is a striking similarity with Taylor's example of undergoing a terrible ritual to be reborn as a reincarnated ancestor. However, unlike the members of Taylor's imagined culture, Hawkins is perfectly aware of the fact that he is still Jeff Hawkins. He does not see himself as two persons, but as one person who at some point felt compelled to

act in a way that required him to live a totally different life. Moreover, Hawkins reveals the level of disorientation present in making such a transition. There are many practical skills involved in ordinary everyday life outside of the Scientology community that a person leaving Scientology may not have, like setting up a bank account. There is the absence of a community one is familiar with, something that is very important for knowing the rules that are at play in the community one ends up with. These things make going about one's 'ordinary' everyday life difficult for a former Scientology member.

Something that may be less obvious in this exchange, but that is still important, is how little a narrative that connects living in these two different worlds helps to express the disconnect. In the case of Hawkins, the obvious them for such a narrative would be 'leaving Scientology'. However, there is much more involved in leaving Scientology than making a decision to abandon one's religious beliefs.96 This is made clear by Theroux' expectation that people would leave Scientology if they are constantly abused and belittled, which leads to the question if people are held at Int Base against their will. As Hawkins' response shows rather beautifully, the pain of leaving one's whole life behind and the difficulty to navigate a world that is so radically different from the world one used to know are more powerful deterrents than bars and armed guards. Most of Hawkins' story is expressed not by continuity ("I am the same person who was a member of Scientology and is no longer a member of Scientology"), but by emphasising discontinuity and difference. Hawkins describes the life he had before he left, the practical requirements of having a life after leaving, and in doing so makes it apparent how different these two are. In doing so, he shows the chasm between his old life and his new life. This is typical of FNSU. Rather than a story showing growth or development, as is typical on Schechtman's account, there is a sudden break, something that can be expressed only very poorly by pointing to the circumstances that led to such a break. The fracture between one's old life and one's new life, as Hawkins put it, or between one's self-

96 One way in which Hawkins' story may be distorted is that he is talking about the experience of finding his way in a different environment with the benefit of hindsight. This may present the picture of a more or less deliberate decision to choose disorientation over despair. However, I think it would be more true to Hawkins' experience to assume that he did not know what he was getting into than to think of him as knowing the kind of disorientation he would experience. In that sense, leaving Scientology would be less of a weighed decision (although obviously Hawkins did not merely act on impulse) and more of an immediate decision to act on the urge to escape.

understanding before and after a key event, can only be expressed adequately by providing two life stories and, in doing so, making the differences between these two apparent.

Now that this illustration has hopefully provided some sense of what FNSU is like, I will proceed to outline the main goal of my thesis. I intend to use the notion of FNSU to argue that this notion poses a problem for what Daniel Hutto calls 'Strong Narrativism'.[97] Hutto uses the moniker Strong Narrativism to refer to the position that narrativity is necessarily implicitly present in the phenomenology of self-experience, a position of which two varieties were discussed here in section 3.2. According to Strong Narrativism it is impossible for us to have an experience of ourselves as selves without a narrative in which such selves are embedded. As Hutto notes, there are stronger and weaker versions of Strong Narrativism. In its strongest version, which Hutto attributes to Rudd, Strong Narrativism considers the narrative unity of one's whole life to be implicitly present in self-experience. However, not all Strong Narrativists agree that a person's narrative necessarily has one unifying theme. Schechtman has suggested that we can think of a person's narrativising as comprising of a series of small stories rather than evaluating each and every one of our actions in the light of our life as a whole.[98] Even so, Schechtman insists that we cannot understand ourselves as selves other than by seeing our lives in narrative form. Therefore, Hutto still considers her view to be a version of Strong Narrativism.

The possibility of FNSU has different implications for Strong Narrativism depending on the version of Strong Narrativism. If there is something it is like to have FNSU, this would directly contradict Rudd's claim that the whole of our life is implicitly present in our self-experience. In other words, if the notion of FNSU captures a true phenomenon, it would show that there is a range of cases in which we understand ourselves narratively, while at the same time our self-understanding captures only a part of our lives. There is, on the other hand, no direct conflict between FNSU and Schechtman's position. As was pointed out in section 3.2, Schechtman allows for the possibility that it may make sense for some people not to connect with past or future events. On Schechtman's view, this does not imply that these people are

97 Daniel Hutto, "Narrative self-shaping: a modest proposal", Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences 15 (2016), 21-41.

98 In section 3.2 I noted that Rudd denies that we can see our lives as a collection of micronarratives. That point was made as a response to Schechtman.

necessarily worse placed when it comes to living the good life. In this sense, the concept of FNSU provides an augmentation to Schechtman's view by delineating a group of cases that fit her exception clause.

Although it may seem as if I am simply agreeing with Schechtman here, there is a catch. Schechtman emphasised how we can (re)connect with past events through a number of actions, like reminiscing over old photographs or attending a reunion (see section 3.2).[99] Having the possibility to perform such actions provides an agent with the option not to perform these actions, which on Schechtman's view can sometimes be a sensible decision. If cases of FNSU are cases where people sensibly choose not to connect with their past selves, then there is no problem. However, this description leaves much in the way of power to the agent. It is perfectly conceivable that someone tries to connect with their past, but does not succeed initially and gives up after a while. It is equally conceivable that someone would do everything in their power to connect with past events, but fails to do so. These would also be cases of FNSU. In these cases, there seems to be less of a decision not to connect with one's own past and more of finding oneself in a condition where one is unable to connect with one's own past. The question FNSU poses for Schechtman, then, is if she would agree that people who are unable to connect with their own past are also not necessarily worse off with respect to the good life.

With regard to the sense of selfhood involved in self-understanding, I will accept the distinction Strawson made between selves and persons. This distinction was accepted by Schechtman, but rejected by Rudd. The point of this distinction is that, if it is accepted, fractured self-understanding does not imply a fractured personal identity. There may be cases in which self-understanding and personal identity are both fractured, such as the ritual mentioned by Taylor in which someone is reborn as a reincarnated ancestor (see section 2.3). Someone who undergoes this ritual may experience FNSU. However, if selves and persons are distinguished, a person may experience fractures in their self-understanding without believing themselves to be a different person. There is a reason why this observation may be very important. As Taylor pointed out, in our culture there is no socially accepted

99 We can imagine examples of actions performed to become more connected with future events, such as a high school student visiting a university to experience what university life is like or a person taking a stroll in a neighbourhood they will move into. Since the examples provided by Schechtman focus on past events, I will have the same focus here.

understanding of living one's life as multiple persons. This means that believing that you are anything but a single person is considered to be a sign of either a serious mental illness or of severe brain damage. [100]This point lines up well with Rudd's claim that typically persons and selves are coextensive, but that atypical situations may occur in cases of severe brain damage.[101] Such atypical situations may be dismissed as pitiable fringe cases, people whose condition is profoundly tragic but of little philosophical interest. However, as Jongepier pointed out, there are psychologically healthy people who nonetheless do not view themselves as a single, enduring self. To take these people seriously, it is important to distinguish their self-experience from the self-experience of people who genuinely believe themselves to be several different persons.

Before I will proceed to discuss FNSU in more detail, a few clarifications have to be made. First of all, FNSU may seem like old wine in a new garb to those who are familiar with Parfit's Russian nobleman case.[102] Parfit described a young Socialist who knew that he was about to receive a large inheritance. He expects this inheritance to change his set of values to such an extent that, after years of living in wealth, he will no longer be the person his wife once committed to marry. Parfit suggests that the Russian nobleman's comments about his future self should be taken seriously at face value (as opposed to, for instance, dismissing them by calling them an overdramatisation). There are a lot of similarities between FNSU and the Russian nobleman case. In both cases, there is a protagonist with two incommensurable perspectives. Moreover, the incommensurability is troubling to the protagonist. Both depend on a change in constituents that leads to the constitution of a radically different self. However, according to Parfit these constituents are not an essential part of personal identity, which needs to be understood independently of its constitution. Instead, Parfit explains the difference of identity by suggesting that the Russian nobleman only has weak psychological connectedness with his previous self, meaning that fewer connections hold between a person at T1 and that person at T2. Under FNSU, fractures are not explained quantitatively in terms

100 The distinction made here is not intended to imply that brain and mind are somehow separate, such that either one's brain is damaged or one's mind is functioning poorly, but instead recognises two different levels at which problems with cognitive functioning can be analysed and described.

101 As mentioned in footnote 60. However, Rudd, "Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance", 421 discusses a different kind of case, in which a person experiences herself as not being or having a self at all.

102 Parfit, Reasons and Persons, 326-329.

of numbers of connections between selves. Instead of making fractures a matter of purely psychological disconnectedness, FNSU focuses on changes in constituents and how these changes have the potential to alter a person's self-constitution.

In the case of Parfit's Russian nobleman, it is obvious that, although he has undergone radical psychological change, there is a sense in which he remains the same person. This is a sense Schechtman calls 'basic survival', which she contrasts with the more subtle survival of one's psychological identity.[103] Schechtman's criticism of analytic philosophers like Parfit is that they treat subtle survival as if it is tangential or irrelevant to a philosophical investigation of personal identity. In other words, the question of personal identity at stake here is, to borrow a phrase from John Christman, a contingent psychological question rather than a necessary metaphysical question. However, as Schechtman points out, contingent psychological considerations still feature prominently in many of moral psychology's important concerns, such as morality and autonomy. Therefore, distinguishing between essential and contingent aspects of personal identity is not sufficient to show that contingent aspects are unimportant to questions about personal identity.

Schechtman does not only argue against psychological continuity theorists like Parfit, though. In “Empathic Access”, she argues that neither psychological continuity theories nor narrative theories are capable of defining exactly “the difference between ordinary psychological development and identity-destroying psychological discontinuity”.[104] The reason why she believes narrative theories ultimately fail is that intelligibility in itself is not sufficient to retain one's identity. An intelligible story about the loss of one's identity, such as the story of the Russian nobleman if indeed he becomes the greedy landowner he fears he'll become, is still a story about identity loss. Schechtman maintains that narrative theories as well as psychological continuity theories are missing a necessary component of psychological discontinuity: empathic access. A person has empathic access if the relation one has to one's past is that one can relate affectively to past versions of oneself. Empathic access, on Schechtman's account, have two elements. Firstly, memories of thoughts and feelings is

103 Marya Schechtman, “Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity”, *Philosophical* Explorations 4 (2007), 95-111. Conceptually, basic survival and subtle survival seem to correspond to the notions of reidentification and characterisation Schechtman introduced in The Constitution of Selves.

104 Ibid., 96.

centered. That is to say, we experience these recollections from a first-personal point of view rather than a view from nowhere. Secondly, we have an at least somewhat positive evaluation of these thoughts and feelings. Schechtman provides the example of a matron who has left her party girl lifestyle behind her, but who nonetheless can still experience the excitement she used to feel about the prospect of going out. In cases such as this one, a person changed because her beliefs and desires were expanded rather than replaced.

Schechtman sees empathic access as complementing narrativity theories by pointing to a necessary element of the retention of personal identity that narrativity theorists have overlooked.[105] In that sense, her argument is reminiscent of Zahavi's point that subjectivity is a missing element in narrativity theories. Indeed, recalling memories from a centered point of view seems to be a specific form of subjectivity. Moreover, the emphasis on affectivity focuses on qualities of psychological continuity rather than making it an arbitrarily quantitative matter.[106] Even so, there is still something of a Lockean emphasis in Schechtman's approach here. Changes in personal identity are understood psychologically as changes in desire or changes in evaluation. FNSU, on the other hand, is concerned with responses to contextual changes. It proceeds from the observation that mental states are intentional and cannot be understood without considering a (real or imagined) context in which these mental states make sense. Moreover, a significant portion of our behaviours and dispositions are situation-specific rather than context-independent. These aspects of our lives are not captured in the empathic access account, meaning that it needs to be augmented to account more fully for what personal identity loss may consist in. Given the later work of Schechtman, particularly *Staying Alive,* I expect that she would in general be sympathetic to the idea that emphasis needs to be placed on contextual features for the constitution of personal identity. Even so, the salient point here is that FNSU covers a set of cases that cannot be fully comprehended by appealing to empathic access.

105 Ibid., 101-102.

106 Despite this observation, the continuity of personal identity is still a matter of degree for Schechtman. However, her justification for this point is that there will be a number of cases where the application of empathic access as a criterion for the continuity of personal identity will not lead to a determinate answer. To account for these cases, Schechtman allows for a grey area in which personal identity is somewhat continuous, but also in some respects discontinued.

One important aspect of FNSU is its ability to account for the possibility of fractures through radical social change. There has been a tendency in the literature to account for lack of narrative unity by referencing psychopathological cases. Although understanding these cases is of course important and valuable, a one-sided emphasis on psychopathology may give off the misleading impression that people not suffering from these conditions always do experience themselves as unified wholes. However, as John Christman points out, it is at least conceivable that there are social constituents of personal identity that are so crucial for a person's identity that this person would not be the same without it.[107] Christman mentions that these are cases of characterisation rather than reidentification, in Schechtman's terms. Even so, there are personal costs associated with stepping away from a narrative framework and having to reorient oneself within a new narrative context, costs that may very well be severe. I will follow Christman in arguing for a middle way between making radical social change incomprehensible on the one hand and dismissing the personal costs associated with such change on the other hand. Providing an account of narrativity that can take this issue seriously will therefore provide a useful tool to aid a group of people that as of yet is underrepresented in the literature.

Next to providing one with acquaintance of rules and customs, social contexts also provide a range of acceptable interpretations of one's actions. To illustrate this notion, consider that according to Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention* actions are known under descriptions of what persons takes themselves to be doing.[108] In her example, the man throwing poison in the well might take himself to be killing a house's inhabitants or bringing forth a new kingdom. What description this man takes to be true of himself will also determine what role he takes himself to play, that of a murderer or a liberator. There are, however, bounds to such feats of self-interpretation. If a witness sees me beating another man to death, I have the possibility to claim it was self-defense, but I do not have the option to conceive of this as a case of euthanasia. Even if there are good reasons why the man I killed was suffering immensely and had no hope of recovery, beating someone to death to relieve his long-term suffering is not an accepted social practice. Thus, if I were to take up this perspective, I would place myself outside of the range of socially acceptable explanations and mark myself in at least one

107 John Christman, *The Politics of Persons* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

108 Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1963, 2000), §23-26.

respect as an outsider. I might be questioned as to whether I truly take up the perspective that I engaged in an act of euthanasia and I might find members of this social group to struggle to believe that I genuinely perceived my action that way. If there are many actions that I would interpret in ways that go outside the bounds of the understanding my social group sanctions, I may find myself having difficulty to express my perspective intelligibly to them at all.

Typically, social contexts that sanction a range of interpretations are relatively stable and change slowly over time.[109] Therefore, most agents are expected to be capable of tracking such changes and adapting their self-understanding accordingly if necessary. There are cases, however, where one has to contend with a context that is so radically different from what is familiar that one struggles to adapt and may find oneself lost for direction. This can occur at the group level, as is described of the Crow tribe in Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope,* or at the individual level, as was the case for Hawkins. In her second autobiography, *The Spiral Staircase,* Karen Armstrong provides a detailed example of the latter by describing her difficulty to adjust to life outside the convent after leaving her sisterhood.[110] Although such changes may often be most difficult to contend with if they happen over a short period of time, I do not conceive of the context-dependence of FNSU as a quantitative relation. That is to say, I do not suggest that the cause of FNSU is weak contextual connectedness between a person's context at T1 and at T2, although there may well be a correlation. The reason for adding this observation is that people may differ significantly with respect to the degree of contextual change they are capable of adjusting to in their self-understanding, meaning that

109 A counterpoint may be offered following Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock.* According to Toffler, contemporary technology changes our society at a rate that many people struggle to keep up with, a psychological phenomenon he refers to as 'future shock'. Toffler's main contention is that, in addition to direction of change, rate of change should be a concern for our well-being. Although my intention in writing this thesis is to illustrate a range of cases in which people shift from one context to another (such as incarceration or leaving a convent), I am sympathetic to the possibility that loss of direction can be caused by contextual changes occurring at an increasingly rapid rate. However, my limited knowledge of technological advancements makes it difficult for me to ascertain how the effects of future shock should be understood.

110 One upshot of Armstrong's account is that it shows the struggles with her transition to a context that most of us would deem preferable over her austere convent life. Similarly, most of us would deem Hawkins' new life to be preferable over his time at Scientology (even if we do not know what he does now). Therefore, disorientation may still occur in new situations that are seemingly better, meaning that this disorientation is not the same as adjusting to adverse circumstances.

large changes may not result in FNSU for one person while seemingly minor changes do have that effect on others.[111]

To sum up the most important points made so far, FNSU is a form of self-understanding in which a fracture occurs between a self at T1 and a self at T2. This does not imply that someone believes themselves to be two persons, but instead means that a relatively sudden shift occurred that cannot be made fully intelligible by providing one continuous narrative. FNSU is something that can occur in psychologically healthy people if they are faced with radical contextual shifts, of which Hawkins' story was an illustration. Social contexts matter because acquaintance with rules and practices is often internal to such contexts, but also because they offer a range of acceptable interpretations of one's own actions. Although rapid contextual shifts may be particularly forceful in posing requirements on people to adjust their narrative self-understanding to their new context, FNSU is not a quantitative relation between different contexts.

Moving on to what I will be doing in each of the next chapters, I will start out with discussing the experience of FNSU. In terms of phenomenology, the question that divides theorists is whether we tend to see our selves (that is, our experience of self *qua* self) as a unified whole or, as Strawson metaphorically put it, as pearls on a string. I will distinguish here between the descriptive question "how do we tend to see ourselves?" and the prescriptive question "how should we see ourselves?", the latter of which belongs in the normative domain. This distinction should be made to allow for the logical possibility that these questions have different answers.[112] One key point here is that there is a tension in Strawson's work between tolerance of diversity and embracing one's own story as the right way to look at the self, a

111 An extreme case here would be classical autism, where changes most of us would consider trivial can make the environment of people suffering from autism difficult to navigate.

112 One option here would be to hold that without the imposition of narratives our phenomenological self-experience tends to be fluttery, but in order to live the good life we need to tell coherent stories to organise our experiences and our responses. For those who claim that we do tend to see ourselves as diachronic wholes, there are two different ways in which the prescriptive question can be answered differently. One might hold that whether we see ourselves as a diachronic whole is trivial, but there is also the option of seeing the unification of selfhood through narrative as unduly restrictive and therefore ethically bad. This last option is attributed to Sartre by Strawson in "Against Narrativity".

tension that needs to be avoided when distinguishing between persons and selves.[113] This is possible if we conceive of fractures in our self-experience not as reflections of ontological dividedness, but as consequences of circumstances that ruptured one's self-experience. A further question that needs to be asked here, though, is whether dismissing the view that we see ourselves as a single diachronic whole implies diachronic atomism. A middle way here is to acknowledge the possibility of fractures in our self-experience, while at the same time allowing that other people do perceive their selves as a (more or less) unified whole.

In the final two chapters I will focus on the relation between FNSU and well-being. With respect to well-being, I will follow recent psychological literature on well being by distinguishing between hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being.[114] This distinction mirrors the different kinds of concerns visible in the writings of Parfit and Strawson on the one hand, and of MacIntyre, Ricoeur, and Taylor on the other hand. One important reason to keep these forms of well-being separate is that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being do not always coincide.[115] I will first focus on the relation between narrativity and hedonic well-being. The main question asked with respect to the psychology of narrativity is to what extent people having a unified narrative in itself increases well-being. A middle way here is a position that respects the diversity with respect to people's psychological make-up, but which also is receptive to the suffering of people whose narratives are less unified than they need. One important factor here is depathologisation; that is, to argue that having a less than fully unified personal narrative is not necessarily pathological, but can also point to a non-pathological response to living in a repressive social environment. Emphasising this factor

113 Stokes, "What's Missing in Episodic Selfhood?", 119-120 mentions that Strawson does not succeed in the ecumenical approach he set out for himself. Stokes is explicitly ethically non-neutral, though.

114 The distinction hedonic/eudaimonic is taken from Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, "On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being", *Annual Review of* Psychology (2001), 141-166. Other psychological literature has pointed to a similar distinction under different names. For instance, as mentioned in their article, Ryan and Deci previously used self-realisation or self-actualisation to refer to eudaimonic well-being. Roy Baumeister, *The Meanings of Life* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1991) distinguishes between happiness and meaningfulness as life goals, suggesting that humans have an innate need to live a meaningful as well as a pleasant life. For a philosophical defense of the distinction between happiness and meaningfulness, see Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and why it Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

115 For instance, according to Baumeister, *The Meanings of Life,* 388-396 psychological evidence suggests that on average parents have less pleasant, but more meaningful lives than their childless counterparts.

will hopefully avoid viewing people with less-than-fully unified narratives as deficient (i.e. chauvinism) and opens up the possibility that a less-than-fully unified narrative can be a consequence of circumstances that, to some extent, we have the resources to subjectively deal with.

The ethical/existential dimension is the dimension of eudaimonic well-being. This dimension is in particular targeted by narrativists who understand narrative unity as a necessary component of the good life. Choosing between chauvinism and triviality is therefore the most relevant here. One important question here is on what grounds arguments are advanced that require us to have a single unified narrative rather than a conjunction of unconnected narratives that, when taken together, capture all of our lives' salient events. This question points to the specific value that is being attributed to the unity of a narrative rather than the presence of a narrative in which an event is captured. Theoretically speaking, the aim here is to describe a position that respects the diversity to which Strawson rightly points. Simultaneously, it is of practical interest to describe ways in which narrativity can be utilised (even if the locus of narrativity is a character more restricted than the person) to embark on projects and to live out ideals that are conducive of the good life. Doing so will reveal resources for living the good life that are still available to people with FNSU.

Chapter 6: The Experience of FNSU

There are people like Hawkins who talk about themselves in terms of an old life and a new life while still being aware of the fact that they are the same person. To explain how this is possible, one needs to distinguish between the person, who continues to be the same, and the self, who finds itself in an old and in a new life. In order to do so, I will accept the distinction made by Galen Strawson between the person and the self. There is, however, a tension in Strawson's work between the goal he sets out to achieve (a plea for diversity) and the account he ends up formulating. This tension is most clearly visible with respect to what Strawson calls the ethical Narrativity thesis, since he spends a considerable part of his article outlining the benefits of an Episodic mode of self-understanding for living a good life. There is a similar tension, albeit more subtle, in his descriptive account. As I discussed in section 2.2, one important concern of Strawson is his ontology of the self. This is important because, as Strawson makes explicit, he believes that there is a phenomenology of the self that gets the ontological picture right. In other words, there is a way of experiencing oneself that corresponds with the self as a thing that is being experienced. The problem here is that Strawson cannot avoid the implication that people whose self-experience does not match his ontological picture are somehow mistaken. In order to hold on to the ecumenical spirit in which Strawson offered his writings, I cannot accept this defense of the person/self distinction.

Strawson is well aware of the possibility that diachronic holists would take Strawson to imply that they are mistaken with respect to their self-experience. Strawson tries to take the edge off this possibility by suggesting that people who see themselves as a unified whole over time experience themselves under a principle of organisation. However, this possibility would be acceptable only if people would be aware of themselves employing such a principle of organisation when they view themselves as a unified whole. If people instead experience themselves simply as a diachronic whole, Strawson still seems to be saying that these people are mistaken about the way in which they frame their self-experience. Moreover, the assumption that we might be aware of employing a principle of organisation clearly does not hold for authors like Anthony Rudd, who argued that there is a unified entity underlying their experience of themselves as a diachronic whole (see section 4.2). As a consequence, Strawson is committed to the position that authors like Rudd, who assume that underlying their self-experience is a unified entity, are actually mistaken with respect to themselves, which seems to belie his appeal to diversity.

I believe the problem with Strawson's approach that has led to this particular tension is that he is doing phenomenology with an eye to doing ontology. This remark is very much in line with the observation Zahavi made when he pointed out that Strawson understands self-experience in terms of experiential selfhood rather than vice versa (see section 4.1). One desideratum here of a phenomenological approach to self-understanding is to be accommodating to different ways of experiencing oneself. I believe that in order to develop a truly inclusive phenomenological approach to experiential selfhood the ontology of selfhood has to be put aside. There simply is no way of suspending judgment while simultaneously maintaining a conception on the basis of which differential judgment would be made if that conception were to be applied.

There are several reasons to adopt Strawson's person/self distinction, but probably the most important reason is that it does not follow from experiencing an event as if it happened to someone else that one thereby believes the event really happened to someone else. In this particular sense, I endorse Taylor's remark that saying "I was another person back then" is either an overdramatisation or clearly false. It seems downright implausible to suggest that psychologically healthy people whose self-understanding is not narratively unified typically make the inference from experiencing an event *as if* it happened to someone else to the belief the event *did* happen to someone else. Strawson's own testimony in "Against Narrativity" that he recalls his past actions, like running a red light a couple of weeks ago, knowing he is the person who performed these actions, backs up this point.[116]

To recapitulate, I cannot accept Strawson's distinction on the same grounds that he offers, since Strawson maintained that there are certain metaphysical properties that pertain to persons but not to selves (temporal extendedness is the clearest example here). As noted before, accepting the claim that the self is not temporally extended would imply that people can get self-experience wrong in the sense that their self as they experience it is different from the self they have (in this case, temporally extended). This would simply reverse the chauvinism that Strawson's opponents use to argue against him. One way out of this problem

116 Strawson's point here was that he can be a responsible citizen because he believes he performed such actions, even if he does not experience those as being committed by the self that now features in his self-experience. This ethical point will be important when discussing FNSU using the social-ethical approach. For now, the takeaway message is that for Strawson, experientially as well as theoretically, different selves does not imply different persons.

might be to take up the position Strawson identifies as opposite to his own: the self is transcendental in a Kantian sense. If the self is transcendental, there is no self-experience that is true with regards to the self. If the transcendental self is the person, then there is a clear distinction between personhood and self-experience. Taking up this position would also mean that we are all on a level playing field with regard to knowing our selves and that there are no grounds for chauvinism. Nonetheless, this still treats self-experience as being mistaken in the sense that there is no such a thing as a self that can feature in our experience. The only difference with a chauvinistic position would then be that we are all habitually mistaken about ourselves. On such an account, it becomes difficult to see how self-experience can tell us something meaningful about who we are and why we should take a phenomenological approach to selfhood to begin with. This is a steep price to pay. Accepting a person/self distinction without raising global suspicion about phenomenological approaches to selfhood would come at a lower price and would therefore be preferable to this kind of Kantian transcendentalism.

Despite this problem, there is also an appeal to transcendentalism in a way that connects with FNSU and common sense. The distinction between self-experience and a real, unknown self provides a person with grounds to dismiss claims made by others about what kind of person one is. For instance, when I work in accounting but really dream of fulfilling my artistic aspirations, I may look at my accounting job and say that an accountant is not who I really am (even if I recognise that an accountant is, in fact, what I am today). People can and do say the same things about parts of their lives without having a clear alternative in mind (which is saying something to the effect of: “I don't know what person I really want to be, but I know it is not who I am today”). It might be tempting at this point to portray some forms of narrative self-understanding as oppressive stories marking out restrictive person-spaces that prevent a person's true self from manifesting itself. People who have come to think of themselves in that way may decide to go on journeys of inner discovery in search of their true selves. While I do not mean to dismiss the personal value of such journeys, it would be a mistake to use global skepticism to ground local negative self-ascriptions of the type “X is not who I really am”. This would imply that, properly understood, such people spend their lives unknowingly alternating between searching for descriptions that fit X and dismissing these ascriptions on global skeptical grounds. It would also mean that experiences of being limited by a narrative from seeing who one really is become meaningless, because no relevant contrast class of self-

knowledge will ever be available. Therefore, while there certainly are people who feel oppressed by narratives that are being told about them, understanding such oppression in terms of a false narrative contrasted with a true, transcendental self gets it wrong.

One might object here that it would be unfair to pin a mistake in applying a theory of self-understanding on the theory that is being wrongfully applied. This is certainly correct insofar as the mistake I mentioned does not offer grounds to argue against the truth of Kantian transcendentalism with respect to the self. I do not intend to argue, however, against the truth of this position. I am describing one way in which it may be used for unwanted commonsense heuristical reasoning that I believe is quite prevalent nowadays. My understanding of this reasoning is that it involves two steps: firstly, as is the case in Strawson's understanding, the (true) self is reified. Secondly, *pace* Strawson, the reified self is situated beyond the bounds of knowledge. While this second move helps to block chauvinism in the sense that it is no longer possible for some kinds of self-experience to correspond with the self, it does not have the desired practical utility in advancing our understanding of FNSU.

An alternative, and I believe more useful, response to the problem of chauvinism is to resist the move to reify the experienced self. Zahavi's formal notion of minimal selfhood (as discussed in section 4.1), for which Zahavi explicitly rejects the reification condition, is extremely useful in this regard. According to Zahavi, minimal selfhood is concerned not with the content of self-experience but with the specific mode in which this form of experience takes place. As such, it is not the experience of a self, but the subjectivity of self-experience that defines minimal selfhood. There is one crucial difference between such a Husserlian conception of selfhood when compared with Kantian transcendentalism. As Sara Heinämaa suggests in her article "Selfhood, Personhood and Embodiment: A Husserlian Approach", there is a tendency to understand Husserl's constitutive subject as a-temporal and unchanging.[117] This is understandable if seen from the light of abstracting away from the content of self-experience. However, much like Parfit's diachronically atomistic conception, this a-temporal self would be lacking precisely the kind of diachronicity that narrativists like MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur argued the self exhibits. For this reason, it is important to get

117 Sara Heinämaa, "Selfhood, Personhood, and Embodiment: A Husserlian Approach", in: *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy,* eds. Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki, and Pauliina Remes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 311.

the distinction between Husserlian transcendence and Kantian transcendence right. Getting this distinction right will also be helpful in outlining an account of personhood that can be contrasted with the kind of selfhood in play in FNSU.

Heinämaa begins her article by distinguishing between three different conceptions of the transcendental ego in Husserl.[118] First and foremost, the ego is an ego pole, a transcendental center from which all intentional actions emanate. However, the ego does not merely bring forth a set of unorganised actions. Instead, the ego has a certain *habitus* or habituality, which situates individual actions in a personal history. Heinämaa is careful to point out that habituality means something other than to act in accordance with social customs, but instead takes this notion to mean that one's actions are sedimented upon previous actions and in doing so are being given a unique *Gestalt.* To illustrate this point, Heinämaa provides the example of losing a loved one.[119] It is not the case that not having this person around anymore magically liberates one from having loving feelings towards that person. Instead, those feelings become a part of one's personal past: they become 'having loved' rather than 'loving'. I might still be able to recall those feelings and experience myself as if I still loved that person, but we should be careful not to confuse the memory of an experience with the experience itself. Husserl distinguishes himself clearly from Descartes by suggesting that the ego pole and the experiencing person are not distinct. For Husserl, the person is constituted as the whole of experiences in time, meaning that the ego is equally bound in time and dependent upon previous experiences. To put it differently, Husserl's understanding of the person adds to his understanding of the transcendental ego by showing how the person is unfolded in time.

For Husserl, a person is not only temporally embedded, but also essentially embodied.[120] As a consequence, Husserl takes persons not just to be origins of intentional action, but also to be constituted through lived experience. This passivity ensures that on Husserl's account, unlike Descartes' position, a person is not merely a disembodied substance, but is an embodied as well as socially embedded subject of experience. To describe the relation between spirit and body, Husserl uses the notion of expression, which he distinguishes from indication by

118 Ibid., 312-317.

119 Ibid., 315.

120 Ibid., 316.

suggesting that expression is an internal relation while indication is an external relation. As a consequence, the expression and that which is being expressed must necessarily be bound together. Husserl's understanding here is that the body is an expression of spirit, meaning that body and spirit should not be seen as separate substances or topics for investigation, but as different aspects of the same thing that are grasped by having different attitudes. Husserl uses this conception to suggest that "[t]he thoroughly intuitive unity presenting itself when we think of persons *as such* (…) is the unity of the *expression* and the *expressed* that belongs to the essence of all comprehensible unities".[121] Thus, persons are embodied and socially embedded beings who experience the world subjectively and whose unity consists in a relation of expression holding between spirit and body.

The relevance of this discussion of Husserl for FNSU will become clearer once the differences between Husserl and Ricoeur are considered. As Zahavi notes, Husserl's topic of investigation was the formal structure of subjective experience, or what he called 'subjective time of consciousness'.[122] Zahavi juxtaposes this position with Ricoeur's response to Husserl. Ricoeur argued that human time is neither the subjective time of consciousness nor the objective time of the cosmos, but bridges the gap between these two times. As Ricoeur suggested, this time is mediated through the articulation of symbolic narratives on both cultural and personal levels. Zahavi takes up this criticism from Ricoeur to suggest that there is a distinction between pre-reflective and reflective structures of human consciousness. This distinction serves in part to support his criticism that narrativists have neglected the pre-reflective structure of subjective experience, as was pointed out in the previous chapter. More interesting in this context, though, is that Zahavi uses this distinction to argue that we should distinguish between pre-reflective (minimal) selfhood and reflective personhood.[123] If

---

121 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge.* Cited in: Sara Heinämaa, "Selfhood, Personhood, and Embodiment: A Husserlian Approach", in: *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy,* ed. Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki, Pauliina Remes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 323 (italics in Heinämaa's article).

122 Dan Zahavi, "The Time of the Self", Grazer Philosophische Studien 84 (2012), 143-159.

123 There are two cases here in which Zahavi and Strawson use the same terminology differently. Firstly, as was discussed in section 4.1, Zahavi's conception of minimal selfhood differs from Strawson's. Secondly, Zahavi's self/person distinction can be confusing when considered in line with Strawson's self/person distinction. As noted in section 4.1, Zahavi reserves the notion of self for the formal structure of self-experience, whereas Strawson focuses on the content of self-experience. Given this difference, their notions of personhood also differ significantly. Zahavi uses the notion of personhood for a narratively constructed identity, whereas Strawson uses theI notion of person to refer to a living being.

Zahavi's argument holds, then what distinguishes selfhood and personhood is the modes of temporality involved in their conceptions: selfhood is conceived in terms of the subjective time of consciousness, while personhood is conceived in the human time of our life stories.

Zahavi's explication helps to put forward a clear demarcation between selfhood and personhood. There is, however, a reason why Rudd would disagree with Zahavi's demarcation. This reason is that Rudd diverts from the view that narratives have to be explicitly constructed and instead argues for lived, implicit narrativity. The problem with implicit narrativity, however, is that it blurs the distinction between pre-reflective and reflective activity, since the notion of implicit narrativity seems to imply that in explicating a narrative one is merely bringing to light something that was already there. Making narrativity pre-reflective and given rather than reflective and constructed also seems to diminish the role played by agency in constructing one's own narrative. I would suggest here that the subjective time of consciousness constitutes subjective experience in a way that makes the structure of our experience amenable to narrative expression, perhaps to the point where it becomes difficult to conceive of conveying one's experience non-narratively.124 However, whether one chooses to express one's subjective experience is a further question. There are many good reasons why expressing one's subjective experience is preferable over not expressing one's subjective experience, but ignoring that there is a step to be taken from experience to expression conflates the expression and what is expressed. Instead, I take a person/self distinction precisely to avoid this conflation and to keep the formal structure of subjective experience and modes of expressing this experience separated.

One reason to avoid the conflation between narratives and what narratives are about is that there are multiple narrations of the same experience. This is precisely the part about narrativity where agency comes into play. One of the strong points of the accounts of narrativity of MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur is precisely that they show how we are not just passive recipients of a stream of experiences, but instead play an active role in the way these experiences are narratively structured. There are, of course, limits to our potential for authorship, as they well realised. Some of these limits (the role played by others in developing our personal narrative, the unwanted possibility of creating stories *ex nihilo*) have been well

124 But see Zahavi, "The Minimal Self and the Narrative Self" for a defense of the position that there are pre-linguistic forms of sociality that help to constitute selfhood.

rehearsed in the literature. A limit to which less attention has been given is the concept of limited adaptability. To understand what I take this term to mean, consider that narratives are not usually static. As time progresses and one adjusts to new circumstances, narratives contain deletions, insertions, and alterations that change one's life story in such a way that one can adapt to changes in one's environment. This does not necessarily mean that one's life story contains confabulation, but rather reflects the observation that different parts of one's life are more salient at different points of one's life. As the notion of limited adaptability suggests, there is a practical limit to the extent to which we can adapt to changing circumstances. This idea is explicated in a manner that is relevant for FNSU in Jerome Bruner and David Kalmar's "Narrative and Metanarrative in the Construction of Self".

Bruner and Kalmar begin their article by taking a pragmatic approach to selfhood. They provide a list of indicators that people use to infer that a self is present. They subsequently compare this list with a set of characteristics that narratives typically have and point out that self-indicators correspond with these constituents of narratives. Their argumentative point is that "[t]hose indicators that are amenable to being placed in some narrative structures that includes an Agent are taken as Self-indicators", which is meant as a claim about the ways in which we typically infer the presence of selves.[125] Narratives are of many different genres, though, and therefore they are capable of encompassing a large variety of selves. For instance, an adventurous self is indicated by a narrative in which agency plays a central role, whereas a focus on commitment indicates a dedicated self. Having arrived at this point, Bruner and Kalmar consider the possibility that people exhibit a variety of self-indicators that are organised as 'sub-selves', each having their own narrative structure. They hypothesise that there are narrative techniques that can be used to unify these different sub-selves into one 'omnibus' self, such as using ironic juxtaposition to connect an otherwise eccentric sub-self into one's larger narrative.[126] Bruner and Kalmar are aware, though, that not everybody

125 Jerome Bruner and David Kalmar, "Narrative and Metanarrative in the Construction of Self", in: *Self*-awareness: Its Nature and Development, ed. Michel Ferrari and Robert Sternberg (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1998), 320.

126 The example Bruner and Kalmar use here is that of Bruner still taking pride in his boatsmanship, even though he learned the relevant skills decades ago and has not used these skills for many years. To incorporate what he calls his "water-rat self" into his omnibus self, Bruner talks about the sense of pride he feels when paying his yearly contribution to two boating clubs, even though he never attends their meetings. Such irony connects what would otherwise be an anachronistic sub-self into Bruner's omnibus self.

actually constructs such an omnibus version of the self. They speculate about possible problems that could explain potential failures to construct omnibus selves, such as the fragmentation of supportive interpretative communities.[127] Although Bruner and Kalmar note the importance of dialogical contact as an interpersonal constituent of personal narratives, they do not pursue this point any further.

The notion that several sub-selves require organisation to be incorporated into an omnibus self is important for FNSU. Another notion in Bruner and Kalmar's article, change, is also important to elucidate the temporal aspect involved in FNSU. Bruner and Kalmar argue that we need malleable forms of self-understanding to navigate a changing environment. Having a fixed narrative self-understanding does not allow a person to anticipate any new options that may be provided and to act accordingly. Moreover, not being able to resituate oneself leads to the formation of "narrative-like psychological maneuvers that protect our self-esteem", such as understanding oneself as an embittered victim or a fundamentalist of some sort.[128] To be sure, the argument here is not that narrative constancy is in itself undesirable, but rather that constancy without some form of alterity reflects a lack of adaptivity. The combination of sameness and change marks an evolving narrative, which corresponds with the life of a person in a changing environment. Like Ricoeur, Bruner and Kalmar insist that distancing oneself from the immediacy of life is required to construct an evolving narrative, meaning that a fixed narrative is a consequence of not being able to distance oneself.[129] For this reason, lacking time to engage in metacognitive reflection or living a life that requires so much of one's cognitive resources that one has insufficient resources available to engage in metacognitive reflection are possible reasons why someone may have less than fully adapted self-understanding. Although such cases differ from FNSU, they are important in revealing the complexity of a narrative that is not merely unified, but also functions as a means to guide a person to living a life in pursuit of a set of different goals in a changing environment.

---

127 Bruner and Kalmar are not committed, though, to the view that not having constructed an omnibus self is a consequence of failed attempts to construct such a self. They note that some people may simply lack the motivation or the mental capacity to construct an omnibus self.

128 Ibid., 326.

129 Bruner and Kalmar suggest that different cultures have different means for achieving this distancing. Unfortunately, they do not reflect any further upon this speculative but very interesting point, making it difficult to read this particular assertion in line with Ricoeur's account.

At this point it is clear how FNSU can build on this idea of multiple sub-selves or of the mind being inhabited by a 'cast of characters', to use Freud's phrase. This idea corresponds with the common-sense observation that in our daily lives we find ourselves in a variety of situations in which we (are expected to) take up different roles. Having to take up several different roles as persons creates the possibility for conflict between these roles. There is, however, no reason to suppose that there is any inherent tension between roles. To the contrary, the role that for instance a first-grader has as a student is not identical with her role as a child of her parents, but parents and teachers presuppose that the child takes up both roles. It seems plausible to suggest that, typically, person-spaces incorporate a variety of sub-selves.[130] In such cases, there is no need to resolve tension between sub-selves by using narrative techniques like ironic juxtaposition, but both roles can be smoothly incorporated into our self-understanding of being a person. I suspect that this is part of the appeal of the notion of implicit narrativity. However, as the example with the parent and the teacher illustrates, this should not be taken to imply that we unconsciously engage in forging narrative connections between the different roles we take up, but rather that the social spaces that we are born into and move in and out of have been shaped through our practices to be more inclusive than taking up a particular role.

Bringing together multiple sub-selves in a single form of self-understanding marked by the idea of personhood helps to distinguish between two types of narratives. Firstly, there is a sequence in which we typically perform actions, as is illustrated by Strawson's example of making coffee. Strawson used the notion of 'trivial narrativity' for the way in which we can describe the order in which we perform such actions. There is also the kind of narrativity described by Bruner and Kalmar, which seeks to unify several sub-selves into an omnibus self. One tempting way to differentiate these forms of narrativity is to suggest that Bruner and Kalmar's narrativity describes connections between sub-selves, whereas Strawson's narrativity describes connections within a single sub-self or socially sanctioned role. This differentiation reflects the tripartition in the accounts of MacIntyre and Ricoeur between actions, customs or

130 I am leaving the door open here for the option that, developmentally speaking, we start out by learning to (unreflectively) see ourselves holistically as persons, and that we may only diverge from this view in the face of conflict between roles. It is, however, also possible that temperamental differences affect whether individuals are inclined to have a default view of themselves as a whole person or as a cast of characters. My thesis will be neutral with respect to these positions and allows for either of them to be true.

practices, and narratives in the sense that, for them, we have to move beyond customs and practices to develop an ethically significant narrative. Applying this differentation to distinguish between these forms of narrativity would, however, be too neat. A person can move from one sub-self to another by telling a story in terms of a sequence of actions. For instance, a child can mention what she did at school, how she went home, and what she did there. The reason this is possible is that the child does move from one context to another, but she can expect both of these contexts as well as the process of transition from one context to another to be familiar to her audience. Because of examples such as this, we cannot expect trivial narratives in Strawson's sense to stay neatly within the bounds of single sub-selves.

In order to avoid such counterexamples, there is no presupposition in FNSU that we start out with a set of isolated sub-selves that require narrative to be connected into wholes. Instead, I will apply Polkinghorne's conception of narrative as temporal Gestalt to selfhood.[131] Polkinghorne has suggested that narratives take the form of a Gestalt in which each part derives its meaning from its relation to other parts and its place in the whole, meaning that in such narratives the whole precedes its parts. A similar conception can be applied to selfhood. On such a Gestalt account, we would see our selves as wholes that may capture but a single sub-self, but that typically capture several, though not necessarily all, sub-selves. There are several upshots to such an approach. On the one hand, it avoids the idea that people necessarily need to forge narrative connections between sub-selves by conceiving the whole as prior to its parts. In this respect, it has the same appeal that implicit narrativity accounts have. Since the self as a Gestalt is not bound to a single sub-self, such a conception has the kind of fluidity that gives self-understanding the kind of adaptability that Bruner and Kalmar mentioned. Most important for FNSU, though, is that it allows for the possibility of several Gestalt perspectives that come into view at different points in time.

The point of having FNSU is precisely that one is disoriented because there is a fracture between one temporal Gestalt and another. One way to illustrate this point would be a tragic case in which one speaks of "life before the accident" and "life after the accident", where a physical inability like being paralysed from the waist down may hinder the continued expression of a variety of sub-selves. Not all sub-selves need to be affected by such a fracture, though. One's love of listening to Celtic folk music may still be unaffected by being paralysed from the waist down. However, the range of possibilities

131 Donald Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis", *International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education* 8 (1995), 12-28.

and the direction in which one's life is going may still be altered (in fact, this seems like a very plausible possibility), even if one keeps some sub-selves as parts of one's Gestalt self after the event that lead to a fracture. Therefore, FNSU does not require that no sub-selves can be a part of both the pre-fracture Gestalt self and the post-fracture Gestalt self. Instead, there are likely other factors that matter, including the organisation of one's sub-selves (or absence thereof) and the relative importance placed on the life being lived when a sub-self is guiding one's actions.

Chapter 7: FNSU and Hedonic Well-Being

Although FNSU may occur in people who are psychologically healthy, it could still be the case that having a unified narrative self-understanding is preferable over FNSU. One remark by Marya Schechtman suggests she thinks of narrative unity this way. At the end of her article "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival", Schechtman suggests that even if having a unified narrative is not necessary for living the good life, it may still be better for a person to have a unified narrative. Schechtman does not elaborate in what sense it would be better, but only provides the example of feeling tinges of nostalgia while browsing through a photo album. This example suggests that Schechtman means that it is hedonically rather than eudaimonically better for a person to have a unified narrative. In other words, one might not strictly need narrative unity in order to live the good life, but narrative unity may still make for a more pleasurable life, as would be the case when we enjoy our past memories. If this is true, and if it holds true for all people, then FNSU would be associated with diminished enjoyment. Moreover, it at least implicitly suggests that such enjoyment cannot be found unless the fracture is mended or overcome (possibly through the kinds of actions Schechtman suggests). We may call this the Hedonic Narrativity thesis. This not the same position as the Ethical Narrativity thesis that Strawson set out to argue against, but what the Hedonic Narrativity thesis and the ethical Narrativity thesis have in common is that they portray narrative unity as superior to narrative disunity. Therefore, it is worth investigating to what extent the Hedonic Narrativity thesis holds up.

A straightforward argument against the Hedonic Narrativity thesis would be to point out that people may very well be different with respect to how much they enjoy looking back at their past. That difference in enjoyment does not need to be a function of the degree to which people identify with the past selves whose actions they are recalling, although this may be a factor. Some people may simply care less about what they were like ten or thirty years ago and instead prefer to focus on the here and now, or perhaps are geared towards the future. Philipp Zimbardo suggests in his book *The Time Paradox* that people have different dispositions with respect to their orientation towards time and distinguishes between past-oriented, present-oriented, and future-oriented people.[132] If this is true, then it may not only be the case that people differ with respect to how much they enjoy acts of nostalgia, but also that

132 Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd, *The Time Paradox* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

some people tend to engage more frequently in such retrospection than others. Such a point would be very much in line with Strawson's reply to the ethical Narrativity thesis: people are simply different, and their experience of themselves over time and the enjoyment they derive from it are no exception.

There is, however, a deeper question about the hedonic value of narrative unity that needs to be asked specifically in the context of FNSU. Is narrative unity really the source of the enjoyment a person gets when they look back at their photo album and feel nostalgia for their former self? The importance of this question becomes clear when we consider that fractures in a person's narrative self-understanding are typically a consequence of dramatic changes in a person's life. It seems natural to assume that when, for instance, a person leaves Scientology, this event is difficult and painful for that person. Their life would have been easier if they had never been forced to make such a difficult decision and never have entered Scientology in the first place. If this decision has lead to FNSU, then by definition this person does not have a unified narrative. It seems at least plausible, though, to argue that if this person experiences less enjoyment when they are looking back at their past, it is not because of a lack of narrative unity, but rather because of the events that have caused a fracture in a person's narrative self-understanding were difficult and painful. If Schechtman accepts the possibility that narrative unity may reflect a more smooth and enjoyable life, and agrees that it would not necessarily be more enjoyable to live a narratively unified life, that would make her remark trivial in Strawson’s sense as far as it concerns the unity of one’s narrative.

One important question with regard to the Hedonic Narrativity thesis concerns the causal role of narratives, particularly when narrating is seen as a form of expression. As was described in section 4.2, Anthony Rudd held that relations of expression exist between mental substance, dispositions, patterns of behaviour, and overt actions. Given these relations, the unity of a person's narrative reflects, via a series of inferences, the unity of the self as a mental substance. Rudd's main motivation for making this point is Kierkegaardian: we need to stand in the right relationship with our past actions to exhibit ethical agency. However, his conception raises questions that are relevant with respect to hedonic goodness as well as eudaimonic goodness. One important question, that was hinted at by Zahavi's critique of Rudd's conception of implicit narrativity, is in what causal relation expressions stand to states that are being expressed. One straightforward conception here is to treat relations of expression here as causally inert relations of signification, similar to the use of the ancient

Greek *semeion* (meaning that, for instance, increased body heat, sweating, and having a runny nose are visible signs of an invisible illness). This would mean that our personal narratives express our personality by making it more visible to an outside observer, but at the same time do not affect our personality. In that case, the construction of an (explicit) narrative would not have any causal impact on one's personality, which, as Zahavi pointed out, seems to treat narratives as implicitly discovered rather than explicitly constructed.

There are several issues that can be raised at this point, but the one most relevant for hedonic goodness is if expressions are really causally inert. Speech acts may provide a counterexample here. Professing one's love to someone is an expression of the way in which that other person characteristically makes one feel. This act is most obviously not causally inert in the sense that professing one's love will affect one's beloved, which in turn will probably affect one as well. Of course, Rudd would not disagree with that. In fact, this is very much in line with his (and McIntyre's, whom Rudd quotes here) point that we are often at best the co-authors of our own story.[133] However, professing one's love also places oneself in a particular relation to one's past. It makes some memories emotionally salient, particularly those that show the beloved in a positive light. Directing one's attention to these memories rather than some other memories will probably make one feel better. To be sure, these memories were probably already stored away somewhere, but the point is that attenuating one's attentional focus to these memories will make their emotional value more apparent.[134] Moreover, it seems plausible to suggest that differences in affect that may be brought about by focusing one's attention on some memories rather than others will also have an impact on one's decision-making processes, meaning that they can play a causal role in the sense of resulting in different actions.

If these observations hold true, then a person's narrative may be an expression of their personal identity, but this expression is not causally inert. This observation primarily points to the price that is being paid by making the 'implicit turn': it obscures the causal effect of

133 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 179.

134 There is an obvious counterpoint that can be made here, which is to argue that recalling such memories have an added effect because in the process of recall they were confabulated or redacted. This is, of course, a possibility. However, if the function of memory recall is to remember an event truthfully as it happened, such alterations can be seen as mistaken performances of memory recall. The point here is that memory recall has an emotional effect even if the memories under consideration are all recalled truthfully.

explicitly narrating personal stories. This is a point that holds perceptually as well as linguistically. Not only does explicitly telling a story about an aspect of one's life have a causal effect, attenuating one's focus to recall some episodes of one's life rather than others also has a causal impact. Rudd might argue at this point that by specifying some episodes as the episodes one chooses to focus on, one also specifies all other episodes of one's life as a background, in which case the causal effects could be attributed to the totality of episodes rather than the episodes one is focused on. This is a possibility that is difficult to refute entirely. However, even if the observations made here would not be sufficient to argue that the *content* of the episodes in one's attentional focus rather than the background episode exhibit causal effects of the kind I described above, then it would still be the case that the *act* of attenuating one's focus on *some* episodes rather than others makes a causal difference compared with having one's attentional focus elsewhere.

The importance of causality with respect to narrativity here is that postulating causal relations between acts of narrative expression and affect is at least expedient (and perhaps necessary) in order to investigate the relation between narrative self-understanding and hedonic goodness. There are two ways in which FNSU can be associated with reduced hedonic goodness. One possibility is that narrative unity causes positive affect in a way that a narratively disunified person cannot experience. The other possibility is that FNSU causes suffering of a type that people with a unified narrative do not experience. In the case of positive affect, if the affect is truly caused by narrative unity, we should expect to see its effects last as long as a narrative remains unified. If narrative unity is something that lasts a lifetime, then this would mean that the hedonic effects are relatively stable and long-term.[135] The case of suffering, however, is less straightforward. As noted before, events that lead to FNSU are often difficult and painful. Therefore, we should expect that people with FNSU experience short-term suffering in a way that people without FNSU do not. However, the effects of such difficult events may subside eventually, meaning that there is no reason to presuppose that FNSU leads to long-term suffering.

135 Descriptively speaking, it cannot be ruled out that there are short-term positive effects of narrative unity rather than long-term effects. However, when narrative unity is considered from an ethical perspective, then I do not see a way to make sense of narrativists' claims about the good life if narrative unity only lasts for short periods of time. Note that if narrative unity is long-term and positive affect is short-term, then narrative unity cannot be the (sole) cause of these spikes in affect.

There is a reason to distinguish between short-term and long-term suffering beyond getting hedonic measurements right. This reason is that it is possible that FNSU leads to positive long-term effects that, hedonically speaking, outweigh its negative effects. Colloquially speaking, this means that such a person is now better off having gone through the event that triggered FNSU. This is connected with the notion of person-space in Schechtman's work. As she pointed out, often there is already a social space carved out for a person at the time of birth. This social space tends to become incorporated in this person's narrative. However, such a narrative may not only be guiding and helping this person to orient themselves on what they take the good life to be. Other people's expectations may well take away opportunities that someone would like to explore. Being expected to stay in Scientology and trying to live a good life within the organisation's limited opportunities is an extreme case, but, less extremely, a woman in an old-fashioned community may also be expected to become a homemaker instead of entering the job market.[136] Breaking away from these expectations and trying to find one's own space rather than the person-space that has been carved out for you will lead to suffering, but it may lead to living a different and more rewarding life. This is a possibility that needs to be accounted for when FNSU is evaluated in the light of hedonic goodness.

The examples mentioned in the previous paragraph do not just show the importance of distinguishing between short-term and long-term effects. They also provide instances of what Tekin has called 'bad' narratives.[137] Tekin mentions three characteristics that she believes 'good' narratives have: they are responsive to historical and psychological facts about an individual's life, they offer a comprehensive interpretation of the subject's experiences, and they are resourceful in the sense of offering individuals different avenues for living an autonomous and responsible life. Tekin uses these criteria to evaluate narratives from an ethical perspective, meaning that her criteria are not directly applicable here. However, she

136 For this example to work, I will presume here that this woman has the ability to obtain a fitting job and that opportunities exist for her to get that job. The role of expectations in shaping a person's narrative is not the same as the role of being discriminated against in shaping that narrative, although the two unfortunately may overlap in practice. The reason this point matters is that overcoming expectations and overcoming being discrimintated against require different paths of action and are likely to shape a person's narrative differently if this person struggles to overcome these barriers.

137 Şerife Tekin, "Self-concept through the diagnostic looking glass: Narratives and mental disorder", Philosophical *Psychology* 24 (June 2011), 357-380.

points to a possibility that is also relevant with regard to hedonic goodness. Apart from these 'good' narratives, there are also 'bad' narratives that are non-responsive, non-comprehensive, or non-resourceful (or, in the worst case, all three). Tekin suggests that 'good' and 'bad' narratives have different causal effects on subjects. Similarly, it is possible that some narratives give us pleasure and other narratives cause us suffering, regardless of whether this narrative is a single unified whole. Although this possibility provides a good reason to argue against the idea that narrative unity in and of itself brings hedonic well-being, it also makes it more difficult to gather evidence to decide this issue either way.

The distinction between 'good' and 'bad' narratives not only serves as a cautionary warning against generalising the hedonic impact of narrative unity. It also opens up the possibility that, instead of promoting well-being, unity is a property of narratives that always has an adverse effect. A version of this position has been defended by some adherents of Relational Frame Theory (RFT). A brief exposition of RFT will be helpful to illustrate this position. Steven Hayes, the designer of RFT and one of the theory's main proponents, follows Skinner by takes a behavioural approach to the self and suggesting that to call something a self is to verbally discriminate one's own behaviour.[138] This happens most straightforwardly by using 'deictic' frames such as I/YOU, HERE/THERE, and NOW/THEN.[139] According to RFT, selves evolve as children use deictic frames to come up with increasingly complex verbal self-discriminations that can be combined with a variety of experiences. These frames allow the establishment of three senses of self: self-as-concept/story, self-as-process, and self-as-context.[140] Self-as-story refers to describing, evaluating, explaining, and understanding the self using conceptualisations that are abstracted away from a specific context. For example, one might say:“I have always been introverted” or “mathematics does not suit me”. Self-as-process refers to a person making observations about themselves such as “I am hungry” or “I

138 For a general account of RFT and behaviourism, see: Steven Hayes, Dermot Barnes-Holmes, and Bryan Roche (eds.), Relational *Frame Theory: A Post-Skinnerian Account of Human Language and Cognition* (New York, NY: Kluwer, 2001). For the application of RFT to conceptions of selfhood, see: Steven Hayes, “Knowing Selves”, *The Behavior Therapist* 18 (1995), 94-96.

139 Deictics are linguistic utterances that function as indexicals.

140 Hayes uses 'self-as-concept', but other authors have replaced this term with 'self-as-story'. As far as I have been able to tell, the difference is purely terminological. See Paul Atkins and Robert Styles, “Measuring Self and Rules in What People Say: Exploring Whether Self-Discrimination Predicts Long-Term Well-Being”, *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science* 5 (2016), 71-79.

hear a whispering sound". Finally, self-as-context means that a person perceives themselves as distinct from particular thoughts and feelings, so that for instance the self is HERE/NOW while the thought or feeling is THERE/THEN. Although Hayes calls self-as-context the transcendental self, his use of this concept appears to be quite different from Kantian transcendence.[141]

As Atkins and Styles point out, the establishment of self-as-story is socially reinforced and provides coherence and predictability to a person's life. However, this conceptualisation of selfhood is by definition disconnected from the everyday flow of experience. A danger of using a disconnected concept of self is that it is rigidly insensitive to context.[142] This means that people who most frequently self-discriminate using the self-as-story frame lack the context-sensitivity to respond flexibly to their environment. For instance, a person with a predominant self-as-story conception of being introverted will have a hard time to see their own extraverted behaviour and may therefore choose to avoid stressful social situations. Atkins and Styles hypothesise that rigid self-conceptions, by making people's responses not sufficiently flexible to their environment, leads to reduced long-term well-being. Their expectation of finding lower well-being in people who often employ self-as-story conceptions is corroborated by the results of their study.[143] As Atkins and Styles note, there is a trend to see positive self-conceptions as reinforcing well-being whereas negative self-conceptions undermine well-being. To correct for this possibility, Atkins and Styles made a distinction between positive and negative storied self-ascriptions and analysed well-being separately for each of these groups. They found that people who frequently employ the self-as-story frame tended to have lower well-being regardless of whether their self-beliefs were positive or negative, although the effects were more pronounced for the group with negative self-beliefs. As Atkins and Styles point out, these results suggest that while having negative self-

141 Hayes uses the term because he believes self-as-context is akin to mental states achieved by those engaged in transcendent meditation who are able to distance themselves from their experiences.

142 Mairéad Foody; Yvonne Barnes-Holmes; and Dermot Barnes-Holmes, "The Role of Self in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy", in: The Self and Perspective Taking: Contributions and Applications from Modern *Behavioral Science,* ed. Louise McHugh and Ian Stewart (Oakland, CA: Context Press, 2012), 125-142.

143 Atkins and Styles measure both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in their study, in part because they use mindfulness therapy as an intervention of which they measure the relative success. With regard to the direct negative effect of frequently employing self-as-story conceptions they only obtained significant results in the domain of hedonic well-being.

conceptions very much undermines one's well-being, positive self-conceptions may not be the cure many people think they are. Instead, several studies suggest that therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness to take people away from their abstract mode of thinking about themselves has the positive effect on well-being that positive self-conceptions lack.[144]

If the findings of RFT theorists hold up under further empirical scrutiny, then they pose a serious challenge to narrativists. Although obviously narrativity as a category is more broad than a list of stable self-conceptions, it is easy to see how stable self-conceptions can help to unify a set of disparate episodes (for instance, by showing how during several times in my life I was overly zealous or anxious). Moreover, providing a unified narrative while avoiding statements of this category seems like a roundabout task at best. Given that Atkins and Styles measured howsition frequently people engage in self-as-story framing and found a correlation between engaging in this type of framing and reduced well-being, one might suggest that there is no negative effect as long as these statements are not used too frequently. Reasonable though this suggestion might sound, this position is more nuanced than the position advanced by RFT's most ardent defenders. The point of RFT is to provide a frame that explains why all conceptions one might have about oneself are unnecessary and unhelpful, captured by Hayes in the slogan "kill yourself every day".[145] Hayes' point is not that using the self-as-story frame too much is unhelpful, but that using this frame at all is.

The extreme position just sketched can be contrasted with positive approaches to narrativity, in particular Strong Narrativity as defended by Rudd. For instance, a supporter of RFT might say that, rather than express character traits, narratives restrict us by imposing character descriptions that keep us from observing and evaluating behaviour that does not align with this description. In other words, narratives that contain stable self-conceptions are selective in a way that hinders rather than helps hedonic well-being. Nonetheless, there are also some

144 Atkins and Styles, "Measuring Self and Rules"; Mairéad Foody et al, "An Empirical Investigation of Hierarchical versus Distinction Relations in a Self-Based ACT Exercise", *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy* 13 (2013), 373-388.

145 Steven Hayes, "Buddhism and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy", *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 9 (2002), 64. A noteworthy point is that, much like Hayes, Strawson's and Parfit's resistance against diachronically extended conceptions of selfhood is associated with a positive attitude towards Buddhism. See Strawson, "The Self" for a relation between his account and his understanding of Buddhism. See also Parfit, *Reasons and Persons,* 280-282 and 502-503.

similarities between the RFT approach and conceptions of narrativity discussed here. In line with Tekin's criteria, lack of flexibility may point to having a narrative that does not promote new modes of action. The hypothesis of Atkins and Styles is also in line with the speculation of Bruner and Kalmar that some people are unable to adapt to their changing surroundings and end up with a rigid narrative. Interestingly, though, Bruner and Kalmar suggested that being unable to step back and reflect on one's experiences caused the rigidity, whereas RFT theorists suggest that the rigidity is caused by being too disconnected and instead point to the benefits of interventions like mindfulness training. This difference raises the question how narrativity is related to practices of stepping back and being in the here and now. One possible answer here would be to suggest that we need some kind of attentional flexibility to switch between reflection and observation so as to avoid the dual traps of being limited by imposed self-conceptions and our own limiting self-conceptions.

The notion of attentional flexibility will be considered more extensively in the next section, as it also has bearing on the question whether a person with FNSU is disbarred from living the good life. For now, the point is not to adjudicate between two extreme positions with respect to the effects of having stable self-conceptions. Instead, it suffices to point out that adapting to significantly different circumstances that have lead to fractured self-understanding is not necessarily worse because one’s self-ascriptions are less stable. Of course, that does not exclude the possibility that a person with FNSU has reduced hedonic well-being, but in such cases the cause of that reduction is likely to be something other than not having a unified narrative.

Chapter 8: FNSU and Eudaimonic Well-Being

One concern that was raised by Kierkegaardian philosophers about Strawson's radical non-narrativity is that it is impossible to exhibit ethical agency with respect to one's life without being a unified person. It may appear that this criticism can also be directed at FNSU. However, a further exposition of Kierkegaard's notion of personhood will show that this criticism does not equally apply to FNSU. In his article "Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism", Roger Gottlieb explores the connection between Kierkegaard's conception of the person and his account of the ethical life. In order to do so, Gottlieb contrasts the sphere of the ethical with the aesthetic sphere in Kierkegaard's work. The aesthete is not a moral agent in the sense that concepts like duty and responsibility mean nothing to him. Kierkegaard uses the figure of Judge Wilhelm in *Either/Or* to criticise the aesthete for lacking a unified sense of self. As Gottlieb puts it, "[t]he aesthete lacks subjectivity in the sense of lacking a consciousness or awareness of an enduring personal identity determined by choice".[146] According to Judge Wilhelm, the aesthete is engaged in a series of accidental, haphazard responses to whatever stimuli appear in their direct environment. The aesthete does not answer the question whether they want to be a good or an evil person. This matters primarily because it means that the aesthete does not step back to answer the question what kind of person they want to be. The absence of directing one's life by choice, of deciding what kind of person one will be, is why the domain of the ethical remains out of view for the aesthete. As a consequence, the aesthete is not a person in Kierkegaard's sense.

It may seem as if Kierkegaard is saying here that one needs to decide to be a good person in order to exhibit ethical agency. According to Gottlieb, though, the point is that a person exhibits subjectivity by reflectively asking the question whether one wants to be a good person. Ethical agency is revealed not by the content of one's decisions, but by the act of stepping back to decide what kind of person one wants to be.[147] Intriguingly, Gottlieb suggests that for Kierkegaard ethical agency is cut loose from both the outcomes of one's actions and one's personal history. The point here is that these elements are not fully under the

146 Roger Gottlieb, "Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism", *The Monist* 62 (1979), 354.

147 This implies that a person cannot choose to live an aesthetic life, of which Gottlieb is well aware. Gottlieb quotes the following passage from *Either/Or:* "He who after the ethical has manifested itself to him chooses the aesthetical is not living aesthethically, for he is sinning and subject to ethical determinants even though his life may be described as unethical." (Quoted in Gottlieb, "Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism", 354).

individual's control and therefore cannot be a part of an ethical agency that depends on individuals' choices. Similarly, our identity cannot be social, because elements outside of our control can change our social relations in ways we cannot control. As Gottlieb puts it, "[i]dentity must be purged of its connections with both society and history".[148] However, as Kierkegaard fully realises, we cannot expect our decisions to have the kind of binding power that Judge Wilhelm expects these decisions to have. Despite choosing to live ethically, we retain the ability to go against the ethical principles we have chosen to commit to. At this point, Kierkegaard makes a religious turn and argues that we need divine assistance in sustaining commitment to our ethical choices. Gottlieb finds this suggestion implausible and looks instead at collective identity, a suggestion that will be considered in the next section. The salient point here is that, on Gottlieb's reading, Kierkegaard is committed to a radical ethical individualism in which the unity of personhood is a consequence of stepping back and choosing to commit to universal principles. Not stepping back and deciding on what kind of person one wants to be is to live the radically amoral life of the aesthete. It seems that this conception is what underlies the assertion that unified selfhood is held as a requirement for exhibiting ethical agency.

There are a number of interesting intersection points between Kierkegaard's position as Gottlieb understands it and criticisms raised against Strawson's non-narrativism. Obviously, in both cases a unified self is posited over and against a mode of perception that perpetually remains in the moment. Authors like Rudd and Stokes use the analogy with Kierkegaard to argue that Strawson's Pearl View, like the aesthete's mode of being, is incapable of grounding ethical agency. Moreover, the self is viewed as unified through a process of stepping back from the moment to reflect on one's life, in line with Ricoeur's account. The focus on choosing what kind of person one wants to be is reminiscent of MacIntyre's teleological approach and may fit his notion of a quest. These similarities make Kierkegaard's account of personhood useful to criticise Strawson's attack on narrativity. The assumption here is that Strawson's account is relevantly similar with the aesthete's mode of being, an assumption that can be strengthened by arguing that phenomenological connections between events need to be narrative in kind (even if this narrative is not made explicit). As we have seen, this is precisely the line of argument that Rudd has taken in his attack on Strawson.

148 Ibid., 356.

In a direct sense, the criticism posed against Strawson does not target FNSU. Even though in FNSU one does not see one's whole life in a single, unified narrative, this does not imply that there any moments in one's life that are unconnected to *any* other moment, as would be the case for the aesthete. This point can be expressed more clearly by pointing out that positing FNSU as a possibility conflicts in two respects with the interpretation given by Gottlieb. The dilemma posited in *Either/Or* is that an individual must live either aesthetically or ethically, meaning that either there is no room for ethical agency or this person unifies their personhood by deciding what kind of person they want to be. The possibility of fractured self-understanding simply does not feature as a position that Kierkegaard considers. The second difference is that FNSU depends on the assumption that contextual factors can have a decisive impact on one's self-experience, whereas Kierkegaard explicitly tries to divest social and historical factors from the decision to be a good or a bad person. Therefore, rather than being a target of criticism by Kierkegaard, FNSU is a position that does not feature among the options Kierkegaard considers.

There is, however, a more incisive way in which this line of criticism can be advanced. This way would be to take Rudd's point that connections between episodes can be nothing other than narrative to argue that, absent any narrative connection, people with FNSU cannot exhibit ethical agency over all of their lives. This point is exacerbated by Stokes' remark that full ethical agency requires a person to respond ethically to each previous episode of their lives. It is important here to be clear on what exactly is targeted by this criticism. There are concerns about responding to imputations of personal identity, about which Strawson said that, despite being non-narrative, he was capable of living as a responsible citizen. These are not the kind of concerns that are of interest here, but which will feature in the next section. The point here is eudaimonistic instead: without a conception of who one is as a person and what kind of person one strives to become, there is no way to live the good life. So, in the terms I have been using here, Strawson has responded to social-ethical concerns rather than ethical-existential concerns.[149] This means that the question if people with FNSU are

149 To be sure, that does not mean that these concerns have eluded Strawson. His speculation in "Against Narrativity" on the apparent need of MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur to see their lives as grand narratives may be taken to suggest that having a need to see one's own life as important or meaningful is a dispositional property. If that would be the case, then individuals might differ with respect to their need to see their own lives as important or meaningful, and then presumably Strawson would be among those who have relatively little need to see their lives as important or meaningful.

disbarred from the good life still stands in need of more substantive treatment. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to responding to this question.

Like the psychological dimension, the ethical-existential dimension is concerned with well-being. In order to distinguish the kinds of well-being in play here I will use a distinction made by Susan Wolf in *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters.* Wolf distinguishes meaningfulness from both happiness and morality as goals towards which human actions can be oriented. Her argument is non-reductive in the sense that meaningfulness can be reduced neither to happiness nor to morality. Broadly speaking, meaningfulness can be thought of in two different ways: internalistic and non-internalistic. Wolf defends a non-internalistic account of meaningfulness, meaning that there are external limits to what people consider as meaningful. Her motivation for this position is a consideration of cases where one might find gazing at a goldfish bowl for hours to be meaningful. According to theorists who defend an internalistic conception of meaning, such as Nomy Arpaly, individuals are fully in charge of determining what actions are meaningful to them.[150] Arpaly agrees that staring at a goldfish bowl is not a meaningful activity, but she argues that we do not need to worry about such cases, since no human who even remotely resembles us would ever consider that kind of activities meaningful. Therefore, worries about absurd possible conceptions of meaningful lives should not lead us to limit the freedom of individuals to conceive of meaningfulness as they see fit.

There is definitely something attractive about Arpaly's approach for FNSU. After all, we can think about Schechtman's notion of person spaces as having the potential to place external constraints on what individuals can become, while heroically overcoming such constraints will liberate such individuals from the shackles of society. FNSU would then be a temporary setback, a further difficulty these individuals have to contend with in their new quest for the good life. There are, however, several reasons not to think of meaningfulness in this way. First of all, it would make the experience of disorientation associated with FNSU unintelligible. No longer being held back by external constraints would be liberating rather than confusing if direction in life comes wholly from within. Moreover, the danger with this position is that it becomes a dark mirror image of Schechtman's position. If meaningfulness wholly comes from within, then individuals can be either externally constrained or inhabit a world that does not affect their pursuit of a meaningful life. Hyperfocusing in this manner on

150 For Arpaly's response to Wolf, see Wolf, *Meaning in Life,* 98-106.

constraints looks past ways in which one's social environment co-constitutes our self-understanding (which was precisely Schechtman's point). FNSU should leave room for such processes of co-constitution, not only because person spaces do not necessarily constrain people, but also it points to a set of resources that individuals suffering from FNSU can help to guide their way.

At this point, it might still seem possible that meaningfulness is socially co-constituted without posing limits for what is considered as meaningful. The argument would then be that meaningfulness is implicitly limited by the way in which self-understanding is constituted. That is to say, people in a society like ours will not engage in the kinds of interactions that will lead them to seeing actions like staring at goldfish bowls as meaningful. Such an account would highlight the redundancy of posing limits on what counts as meaningful actions. However, meaningfulness is typically constituted by developing particular stories about what makes lives meaningful rather than pointing to a horizon of all possible ways of living meaningful lives. This makes the distinction between obviously absurd conceptions of meaningfulness and highly unusual but genuine conceptions of meaningfulness difficult to apply. Therefore, I will apply an account of meaningfulness that takes the first-person perspective seriously, while still maintaining that there are limits to what we on reflection would consider meaningful.

The account I will apply to FNSU here is the Reflective Wisdom Account, developed by Valerie Tiberius in *The Reflective Life: Living Wisely With Our Limits.* An important feature of Tiberius' approach is that it is first-personal and process-based rather than third-personal and goal-based. Her main reason for defending this approach is that the question "How should I live?" cannot be reduced to "What is a good life?" Instead, she holds that a first-personal approach and a third-personal approach should be complementary. Providing a process-based account has the advantage of showing from a practical-philosophical point of view how we can go about living a good life rather than arguing from a distance what constitutes a good life. In addition to arguing for the importance of the first-personal perspective, the complementarity with third-personal approaches dismisses scepticism with respect to the good life as well.[151] Because we can have some knowledge of what might constitute a good

151 A different way to make the same point is to say that, even if I do not know what constitutes the good life for you, I know that it does not involve staring at a goldfish bowl for hours each day.

life, Tiberius argues that a good life is not just whatever we take to be good for us (which would eliminate the possibility of making mistakes in living the good life). She posits the condition that our notion of the good life needs to hold up to reflective scrutiny. Formulating a similar constraint for narrative self-understanding may be helpful in showing one way in which narrative self-understanding is particularly difficult to regain after it has become fractured. Thus, Tiberius' starting point is helpful to give a first-personal viewpoint its proper place with respect to living a good life.

As the book's subtitle suggests, Tiberius develops an account of reflective wisdom while taking seriously observations from empirical psychology suggesting that reflection only has limited impact on our lives. In doing so, she seeks to find a middle way between on the one hand living one's life in accordance with an unattainable ideal and on the other hand with dismissing the importance of reflection based on its limitations. Her general strategy is therefore analogous to the strategy I intend to pursue here. Before discussing Tiberius' account any further, though, I will address one difficulty in applying her account to narrativity first. To illustrate why a fully reflective life would be unattainable, Tiberius appeals to Jonathan Haidt's metaphor for rationality as a rider on an elephant. On this picture, we have both a reflective self (the rider) and a non-reflective self (the elephant), with the former exerting only limited control over the latter. Tiberius' approach to living with our limitations within this picture means that we should accept this non-reflective part of ourselves as being largely beyond our control and to focus on ameliorating our faculty for reflection. The notion of limited control means that our non-reflective faculty functions with a degree of autonomy. However, in the case of narrativity the relation between the pre-linguistic and linguistic domains is a relation of transformation (Rudd is probably the most explicit on this point). This presents two possibilities: either reflection is unlike narrativity in the sense that it has a more limited scope, meaning the analogy between narrativity and reflection is flawed, or there is a real difference between the kinds of relationships that are said to hold between automatic and deliberative processes, the consequence of which would be that in adopting a reflection-like approach to narrativity I am not using the same conception as do narrative theorists like Rudd.

It is important for the case of fractured narrative self-understanding to respond to this difficulty. Fractured narrative self-understanding by definition means that we are limited with respect to how much of our lives we can subsume under one grand narrative. There are, however, two extreme possibilities with respect to fractures that have to be avoided. On one

side of the spectrum is a form of dogmatism, which would be to hold that narrative unity is a requirement for the good life and that people lacking in narrative unity (even if it is allowed this can occur in a non-pathological fashion) should fix themselves to avoid missing out. On the other side is a form of fatalism, meaning that narrative self-understanding is irredeemably fractured. In order to avoid both extremes, my strategy will be to argue that we have resources available to live the good life even if our self-understanding is fractured while insisting that this picture does not imply fatalism with respect to the nature of fractures in our self-understanding.[152] Avoiding these extremes relies on the observation that acts of self-understanding are temporally embedded and that their outcomes may change over time, although such changes may be slow and gradual rather than instant. In other words, even if fractured narrative self-understanding implies that we really are limited with respect to how much of ourselves we can understand in a single narrative, this limitation should not be taken as essential. This approach is compatible with the position (that I take to be Ruddian) that we do have stable character dispositions, but that there are radical circumstantial changes that make most (or even all) of our characteristic behavioural expressions impossible.[153] A consequence of such circumstances would be that, through our unfamiliar behaviours and responses, we become strangers to ourselves.

According to the Reflective Wisdom Account, a good life is a life that is guided by ends, goals, and values that stand up to deep, critical reflection.[154] Tiberius uses the term 'reflective virtues' for these qualities and she understands having these virtues as a part of living wisely within one's limits. Reflective virtues are comprised of cultivatable habits of thought, strategies, or skills that are organised around a practical need that is likely to contribute to

152 There are cases in which a change in circumstances that leads to fractured narrative self-understanding is accompanied with a lack of resources, as might for instance be the case for people who are incarcerated or who are locked away in a mental institution. In these cases, limitations posed on our self-understanding are not caused by fractures in our self-understanding, but by the circumstances that brought on these fractures.

153 The converse position here would be to insist, in line with situationist philosophers like John Doris, that character dispositions are rarely stable. This is a different position from the one I am outlining here. While I certainly believe that radical changes in a person's life can lead to lasting differences in characteristic behaviour, I take the extremity of such changes to be compatible with the idea of the relative stability of character dispositions. I will therefore remain neutral with respect to whether character dispositions are relatively stable or not.

154 Tiberius specifies that, unless specified otherwise, whenever she uses the term 'reflection', what she means is being engaged in this form of deep, critical reflection. I will follow this use of the term here.

living well in a way that can be appreciated from the first-person point of view.[155] For instance, the virtue of (realistic) optimism helps to promote appropriate critical reflection and proper motivation for the pursuit of what one values. At this point Tiberius' emphasis on the reflective nature of virtues might raise the question if focusing on this kind of reflection provides a hyper-rational account of living a good life and moves past the contingencies of experience and changing circumstances. This is not how Tiberius understands the role of reflection, though. Tiberius is well aware of the fact that we are not always or even very often engaged in deep, critical reflection, nor does she believe that we should be. As she points out, a life spent in perpetual reflection is a life few of us would deem good. Moreover, throughout our lives there is a plurality of things we end up valuing, some of which require us to be absorbed in our pursuit of what we value rather than to engage in reflection. According to Tiberius, one aspect of practical wisdom is precisely to know when to be engaged with experience and when to step back and engage in reflection. This point will become clearer when the virtue of attentional flexibility is discussed.

To illustrate the role of reflection in more detail, Tiberius takes as her starting point that living well from the first-person perspective requires one to take up that perspective and reflect on what it means for one's life to go well. In reflecting on what we value in life, Tiberius suggests that there are standards of appropriateness according to which values can be better or worse, and that we aim to endorse those values that we believe are better. This creates a continuum along which values can be situated, with values that would not survive the least bit of reflection as one extreme and values one would always reflectively endorse as the other extreme. The latter is what Tiberius calls reflective values. On her account, reflective values have two functions: they are action-guiding and they serve as a standard for justification of other reflective values and for general reflection on how one's life is going. In order to function, reflective values need to have stability or diachronic consistency. One might take this requirement to imply that fractures in our narratives reflect diachronic changes in what values we hold up. This is not a necessary consequence. For instance, it is still possible for a former Scientology member to have valued intellectual integrity throughout their entire lives, but to take their commitment to intellectual integrity to have very different implications now

155 Valerie Tiberius, *The Reflective Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18. Note that Tiberius conceives of reflective virtues as habits rather than stable dispositions in order to avoid criticisms raised by situationists like John Doris.

that they are presented with largely different evidence. While intellectual integrity certainly can be a theme that unifies a narrative, it does not typically shed light on all or even most aspects of life, meaning that the perspectives of this person before and after leaving Scientology might still be largely incommensurable, although these perspectives would no longer entirely incommensurable if intellectual integrity is accepted as a justificatory value.[156]

There are cases, however, in which an event that causes FNSU also leads to changes in value commitments. For instance, if religious belief is a reason for sexual abstinence, then apostasy (which can lead to FNSU, as Karen Armstrong's previously mentioned autobiography illustrates) would challenge the value of abstinence. Tiberius is well aware of the problem that changed circumstances can affect what values one would reflectively endorse. In order to handle this problem, Tiberius defines stability as a defeasible disposition not to reconsider our values. There are two sides to this definition. On the one hand, Tiberius' account presupposes that reflectively endorsing a value means that we have reasons for valuing the goal or end towards which a value guides our actions. Given that at some point that value was reflectively endorsed, something compelling needs to happen before a reflective outcome would change. Therefore, stability can be granted by not reflecting on previously endorsed values if there is no good reason for doing so.[157] However, the defeasibility condition allows for the possibility that something big enough changes for one to reconsider the value in question. By adding this condition, stability can be distinguished from rigidity. This condition also allows for the possibility, relevant for FNSU, that events that cause FNSU are also events that warrant reconsidering reflective values. Therefore, despite the stability that reflective values need to have in order to function normatively in one's life, the Reflective Wisdom Account and FNSU are not incompatible.

One important aspect of Tiberius' account that is that she limits the role of reflection by recognising that we need to step back to reflect, but also respond immediately according to

156 Note that this argument depends on the assumption that there are multiple values that we can reflectively endorse and that there are several different perspectives we can take up. This argument cannot go through if there is a single value like the Good that is supposed to unify a narrative or if we focus on the content of the narrative rather than the perspectives that a person can take up. The importance and the role of perspective-taking will be discussed further in a later part of this section.

157 This is also a part of the explanation for how reflective values can still be operative 'behind the scenes' when one is completely absorbed in the pursuit of an end one deems valuable.

our practical wisdom if the situation requires a more direct approach.[158] As Tiberius points out, a decision whether or not to reflect cannot possibly be made reflectively, since that would already imply having engaged in reflection. However, if practical wisdom means to shift perspectives in the right way, for the right reasons, and at the right time, then it would stand to reason that what makes a shift in perspective right depends on that person's reflective conception of the good life. To avoid this position, Tiberius suggests a two-part answer. The first part of her answer is to suggest that motives that are not a part of a particular practical situation are nonetheless implicitly present in that situation. Tiberius holds that a wise person is capable of recognising when such a motive might be present and widen their focus somewhat to make this motive present on the periphery of their attentive field.[159] The wise person therefore has the potential to bring this motive into full view. However, according to Tiberius this is not always necessary to act. The second part of her answer is precisely that normative considerations can be grasped and acted upon without engaging in reflection. Therefore, it appears to be that implicit motives do not imply implicit narrativity, but instead suggests that motives can have a certain pre-narrative effect on our actions. Of course, it is highly unlikely at best that someone can become a wise person in some respect without stepping back to reflect on their motives, but Tiberius' point is that such reflection does not need to be present (either explicitly or implicitly) to guide skillful action. With respect to FNSU, this is important because motives may remain operative in a person's life even after the narrative framework in which these motives were encapsulated has broken down. If such motives can be attuned to practical situations in which people with FNSU find themselves, then they have the potential to act wisely without a narrative of their whole lives.

There is another aspect of shifts in perspective that is important here. Shifts in perspective may occur as a response to extreme changes in a person's situation. Tiberius provides the example of a man who has heard that he will die soon and who starts to appreciate beauty in nature and the smells of flowers. He had a conception of what the good life meant for him, which was centered around providing for his wife and children, and lived his life adopting a longer-term perspective. However, the sudden bad news changes his point of view thoroughly and gets him to focus on the here and now. The problem with examples like this, Tiberius notes, is that it depicts shifts in perspective as accidents, as something that happens to us

158 Ibid., 77-83.

159 Ibid., 80.

rather than something that we can affect.[160] Tiberius maintains, though, that this would be too one-sided. There are ordinary circumstances, like going rock climbing or leaving one's job to go home to one's family, that can trigger shifts in perspective. However, worrying about one's job may keep a person from shifting to the values of family life or being fully absorbed in rock climbing. Conversely, a person can avoid reflection in order to put off a difficult decision. The possibility of failure to shift perspectives in an appropriate manner implies that being able to shift perspectives in an appropriate manner cannot be explained by appealing to circumstantial changes alone. Therefore, shifting perspectives must be explained to a degree by appealing to agency.

This question concerning agency and circumstantial changes is closely connected with a comment made by Schechtman. She suggested that it may not be desirable for a person to perform actions like looking at a photo album to connect with their past (see Interlude). One question raised in the Interlude in response to Schechtman is whether it would make a difference if a person decides that connecting with their past is not very good or useful, or if a person attempts to connect with their past but fails to do so. The relevant difference between these two cases is that in the former case not being connected with one's own past is the result of a decision, but in the latter case the result of an insurmountable circumstance. This seems to imply that agency comes into play in the former case, but not in the latter. I think the reason for this apparent implication is that Schechtman seems to assume that attempts to connect with one's own past will be successful. This would be why a person can choose whether or not to connect with their own past through the kinds of actions she mentions. However, the preceding discussion of Tiberius' account shows how agency may also be operative in attenuating one's focus. If this holds, then a person who decides no longer to go through with efforts to connect with their own past (even if they are utterly unable to do so) would still exercise a form of agency. Moreover, switching one's attention away from the past and focusing on the here and now may be done wisely.

With respect to FNSU, it is very important to emphasise that deciding to stop trying to connect with one's own past through such actions as mentioned by Schechtman can be a form of exercising agency, even if all such attempts were doomed to fail. At first glance, this may appear as a form of resignation: accepting the fact that one's past is forever out of narrative

160 Ibid., 78-79.

reach. I think, however, that this would frame this decision too negatively. To see why, consider the example of a happily married couple who do everything together until the woman passes away. Her husband, now a widower, cannot imagine life without her and spends his days grieving over her loss. This is of course perfectly acceptable for a period of time, but imagine that months after his wife's death the man still ignores his practical business and spends all of his time ruminating his past married life and imagining what life would be like if she still were here. There is a point at which we would consider this man's response to be inappropriate, since no matter how painful his loss is, at some point the simple practical reality is that life goes on. With this example in mind, there is some kind of skill involved in shifting one's perspective from the past and to present matters. I believe this point equally holds in cases where efforts to connect with one's own past would always be futile.[161] Instead of resignation, perhaps being able to admit defeat is a more appropriate way to describe such a shift.

161 One example that comes to mind here is an apostate that keeps frequenting religious forums and messaging boards to engage bitterly in discussions with religious members of forums or boards.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Some people have the difficult fate of having to live through changes that require them to do a lot of adaptation. In such cases, it may occur that the task set before them turns out to be greater than their ability to adjust, and they find themselves with several self-narratives that cannot be made into one big whole. The fact that this can happen to psychologically healthy people provides us with enough reason to take this possibility seriously. We are all limited with respect to the degree to which we can adapt to new situations: our cognitive powers, our metabolic energy, and our time are all simply limited. This is the first thing I hope my thesis has conveyed: Fractured Narrative Self-Understanding is not limited to those who are weak, damaged, or mentally ill, but instead is something that under the 'right' circumstances can happen to anyone. We all are embedded in a social context that makes us acquainted with particular sets of rules and customs. We are all engaged in practices that require us to respond in a situation-specific manner rather than situation-independent. These are constitutive elements of our selves and therefore something to be cherished, but they also render us vulnerable. I hope my thesis has succeeded in conveying this particular vulnerability.

At the same time, people can be remarkably resilient. We can not only perform actions to reconnect with our past, but we can also continue to respond to our immediate practical needs or even decide that remaining fractured is the best course of action. And even if one's old life is gone, there is still the possibility to think about what the good life would be in these changed circumstances. It may even be the case that one's own self-narrative functioned as a prison, keeping one from exploring the many different courses of action that might be available to one. In such a case, not only is such a person not worse off if their narrative self-understanding fractures, but they might conceivably at some point be better off. However, it is all the more important that we do not think of the difficulties people with fractured narrative self-understanding face as insurmountable. To do so would be to cast these people in the role of victims, and effectively to be creating a new, negative narrative for them. Instead, I hope my thesis has conveyed an image of fractured narrative self-understanding as a condition that may occur due to difficult circumstances that need to be taken seriously, while at the same time remembering that people with fractured narrative self-understanding are not disbarred from living the good life. If my thesis has thus presented an image of a difficulty that can be overcome in practical everyday life, then I have succeeded in perhaps the most important respect.

References:

Anscombe, Elizabeth. *Intention.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1963, 2000.

Armstrong, Karen. *The Spiral Staircase.* New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2004, 2005.

Atkins, Paul, and Robert Styles, "Measuring Self and Rules in What People Say: Exploring Whether Self-Discrimination Predicts Long-Term Well-Being", *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science* 5(2016): 71-79.

Baumeister, Roy. *The Meanings of Life.* New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1991.

Bruner, Jerome; and David Kalmar, "Narrative and Metanarrative in the Construction of Self", in: *Self-awareness: Its Nature and Development,* edited by Michel Ferrari and Robert Sternberg, 308-330. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1998.

Christman, John. *The Politics of Persons.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Damasio, Antonio. *Self Comes to Mind.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2010.

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Foody, Mairéad; Barnes-Holmes, Yvonne; Barnes-Holmes, Dermot; and Carmen Luciano. "An Empirical Investigation of Hierarchical versus Distinction Relations in a Self-Based ACT Exercise", *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy* 13 (2013): 373-388.

Foody, Mairéad, Barnes-Holmes, Yvonne; and Dermot Barnes-Holmes, "The Role of Self in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy", in: *The Self and Perspective Taking: Contributions and Applications from Modern Behavioral* Science, edited by Louise McHugh and Ian Stewart, 125-142. Oakland, CA: Context Press, 2012.

Gallagher, Shaun, and Dan Zahavi. *The Phenomenological Mind.* London: Routledge, 2008, 2012.

Gottlieb, Roger. "Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism", *The Monist* 62 (1979): 351-367.

Hayes, Steven. "Buddhism and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy", *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice* 9 (2002): 58-66.

Hayes, Steven. "Knowing Selves", *The Behavior Therapist* 18 (1995): 94-96.

Hayes, Steven; Barnes-Holmes, Dermot; and Bryan Roche, ed. *Relational Frame Theory: A Post-Skinnerian Account of Human Language and Cognition.* New York, NY: Kluwer, 2001.

Heinämaa, Sara. "Selfhood, Personhood, and Embodiment: A Husserlian Approach", in: *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy,* edited by Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki, and Pauliina Remes, 311-328. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.

Hutto, Daniel. "Narrative self-shaping: a modest proposal", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15 (2016): 21-41.

Jongepier, Fleur. "Towards a Constitutive Account of Implicit Narrativity". *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15 (2016): 51-66.

Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* London: Bloomsbury, 1981, 1985, 2007.

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, 1991.

Polkinghorne, Donald. "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis", *International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education* 8(1995): 12-28.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another.* Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1992.

Rudd, Anthony. “Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity”. *Inquiry* 50 (2007): 541-549.

Rudd, Anthony. “Narrative, Expression and Mental Substance”. *Inquiry* 48 (2005): 413-435.

Rudd, Anthony. Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Ryan, Richard; and Edward Deci. “On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being”, *Annual Review of Psychology* 52 (2001): 141-166.

Schechtman, Marya. *The Constitution of Selves.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Schechtman, Marya. “Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity”, *Philosophical Explorations* 4 (2007): 95-111.

Schechtman, Marya. “Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View”. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 82 (2007): 155-178.

Schechtman, Marya. *Staying Alive.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Slors, Marc. *The Diachronic Mind.* Dordrecht: Springer, 2001.

Stokes, Patrick. “What’s Missing in Episodic Self-Experience?” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17 (2010): 119-143.

Strawson, Galen. “The Self”. In: *Models of the Self,* edited by Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear, 1-24. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1999, 2000, 2001.

Strawson, Galen. “Against Narrativity”. *Ratio* 17 (2004): 428-453.

Strawson, Galen. “Episodic Ethics”. In: *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel Hutto, 85-116. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Strawson, Galen. *The Subject of Experience.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Taylor, Charles. “What is Human Agency?”, in: *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1,* edited by Charles Taylor, 15-44. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Tekin, Şerife. “Self-concept through the diagnostic looking glass: Narratives and mental disorder”, *Philosophical Psychology* 24 (2011): 357-380.

Tiberius, Valerie. *The Reflective Life.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock.* New York, NY: Random House, 1970, 1990.

Walsh, Philip. “Dan Zahavi: Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy and Shame”. Husserl Studies 32 (2016): 75-82.

Wolf, Susan. *Meaning in Life and why it Matters.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Zahavi, Dan. “Self and Other: The Limits of Narrative Understanding”. In: *Narrative and Understanding Persons,* edited by Daniel Hutto, 179-202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Zahavi, Dan. “The Minimal Self and the Narrative Self”. In: *The Embodied Self: Dimensions, Coherence, and Disorders,* edited by Thomas Fuchs, 3-20. Stuttgart, Schattauer, 2010.

Zahavi, Dan. “The Time of the Self”, *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 84 (2012): 143-159.

Zahavi, Dan. Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Zimbardo, Philip; and John Boyd. *The Time Paradox.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008.