Climate change ethics and narrativity: a new story

In search of a broader paradigm for a more inclusive, productive and critical climate debate

Abstract

Both the scientific and ethical case for human-caused, environmentally destructive climate change have been made. That our daily lives and the world we live in will change dramatically seems inevitable. For the better or for the worse? That is a question of which people's collective behaviour determines the answer. Yet, as it seems by now, although people seem to be aware of what is demanded from them, they do not act accordingly. In this thesis, I will argue that it is narration, rather than rational deliberation, that ultimately brings people into action. At the same time, I hold that a structural negation of the significance of narratives by our modern Western culture, has led to people losing their sense of historical urgency and agency, resulting in a lethargic and fatalistic attitude. The public debate seems to be short-circuited: only the experts are seen to be able to determine what the future will hold for the people and a fixed perspective dominated by a salvation in the form of science, remains. The need to start paying attention to what stories we tell ourselves is thus more urgent than ever. In the last part of this thesis, I will sketch the outlines of a 'narrative paradigm' as a framework that is more inclusive with regard to public deliberation and provides the means to critically assess the narratives that circulate in society. I will conclude by making recommendations to researchers in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities.

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Introduction

"[T]he global environmental tragedy is most centrally an ethical failure, and one that implicates our institutions, our moral and political theories, and ultimately ourselves, considered as moral agents" (Gardiner, 2011, p. 3).

The scientific case for human-caused climate change with catastrophic effects has been made. Massive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions induced by humans, lead to the conclusion that "[i]t is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century" (IPCC, 2013). A position about which 97,2% of the climate scientists agree (Cook, Nuccitelli, Green, Richardson, Winkler et al., 2013). In the meanwhile, the ethical case has been made as well: Although, as may be expected, environmental ethicists continue to argue about what would be a justified division of benefits and burdens and who or what should be conceptualised as agents, "there seems to be a strong case for deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and financial transfers to aid climate adaption" (Kamminga, 2008, p. 676; Sinnot-Armstrong, 2005; Brown, 2013). It is also clear that people's lifestyles in affluent western societies, as opposed to those in third-world countries for instance, are of the most impact. Thus, from the environmental-ethical perspective, the main thing that people hear nowadays, is how morally problematic their way of life is and that they ought to change it.

Yet, at the same time, the collective action that is demanded in order to avoid the situation from severely escalating, stays out (Gare, 2001, 2008; Hulme, 2014). To make things worse, pollution in the form of plastic packaging, car-driving and travelling by aircraft, happens to be only the tip of the iceberg. Most of the environmental damage is done elsewhere in the process of producing and transporting such goods that are part of people's lifestyle (e.g. electronic devices or meat), so-called 'hidden impact' (Porcelijn, 2016). The very embedment of the many unsustainable practices in people's daily life and thus culture, make it increasingly demanding to

abandon them.

Another complicating and difficult property about the ethics of climate change is the odd time span between behaviour and result (i.e.: 'feedback-loop'). Whereas in the usual sense of morality, actions always had more or less direct results in time-technical terms, in case of environmental ethics, people are now suddenly required to anticipate on effects that will only be realised long after their death.[1]

Since I take this situation to be severely problematic, I would like to make an attempt of investigating the potential of a different approach than the ways in which the two mainstream ethical theories of utilitarianism and Kantianism[2] have been applied thus far. Although these theories are especially strong in justifying and cohering their arguments, their motivational aspect seems to be of less significance. In this thesis, I will suggest that this has something to do with those theories' implicit conception of the self as uniquely gifted with the faculty of reason.

Contrary to this, there exists a line of thought that conceptualises man "in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, [as] essentially a story-telling animal" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 216). This claim is called 'the narrativity thesis'. Starting from that alternative conception of humankind, I will suggest that in addition to the regular way in which normative ethical theories operate (presenting people clear-cut moral constraints and -obligations), the construction of narratives might offer an alternative approach for addressing and motivating people to change their way of life into a more sustainable one. Therefore my research question: "*Can the narrativity thesis enrich the climate debate?*"

I will stress from the beginning, however, that I will not be concerned with a detailed enquiry into the exact nature of the concept of 'narrative' or 'story'. I will stick to a rough working definition that describes it as 'a temporal structure with a beginning, middle and an end (or *telos*[3]), that functions as a mechanism for humans to situate themselves in- and give meaning to their day-to-day life (i.e.: lived-experience)'.

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[1] Admittedly, now there are already significant effects measurable (especially in the poorer countries). Still, I hold that these effects are not significant enough to confront people with the results of *their* behaviour.

[2] I will use the terms 'deontology'/'Kantianism' and 'consequentialism'/'utilitarianism' interchangeably, or simply denote them by 'mainstream ethical theorising', since I am particularly concerned with their general *motif* of reasoning and not with their many subdivisions.

[3] Ancient Greek for 'end', 'purpose', or 'goal'.

In order to set the stage, I will take Bernard Williams' critique of the two mainstream ethical theories of utilitarianism and Kantianism, as a point of departure. In his 1985 essay 'Morality, the Peculiar Institution', Williams argues that the moral system as we know it today and in which the two aforementioned theories are contained, illegitimately proclaims an absolute and inescapable position in people's lives in the form of the insistence on 'moral obligations'. Drawing a distinction between ethics and morality (where morality is a sub-system of the former), he identifies morality's attitude as that of its 'purity', while "[i]n truth, almost all worthwhile human life lies between the extremes that morality puts before us" (p. 194). This insistence on purity that Williams recognizes in contemporary moral thought, expresses itself most clearly in his analysis of the just mentioned concept of moral obligations. As opposed to the everyday notion of an obligation (e.g.: being obliged to visit a friend, because you promised her to do so), a *moral* obligation entails "a conclusion that is directed toward what to do, governed by moral reasons, and concerned with a particular situation" (pp. 174-5). Recognizing the morality system's demand to back a particular obligation with a general one, Williams illustrates the difficulty of this so-called *obligation-out obligation-in* principle with the following example: On your way to a friend towards which you have the everyday obligation to visit her, you find yourself confronted with an emergency situation on your way. The feeling of being obliged to assist in this particular setting, thereby missing your appointment, is thought to be derived from the general moral obligation of having to help in an emergency. However "[o]nce the journey into more general obligations has started, we may begin to get into trouble (...) with finding room for morally indifferent actions" (p. 181). Following this path then, those general moral obligations will eventually demand that *if one could, then one should*, not be wasting time by being concerned with things that one has no obligation to (e.g.: 'hobbies'). At this point, "in order to do what [one] wants to do, [he] shall need one of those fraudulent items, a duty to [himself]" (p. 182). This illustrates how Williams identifies the system's purity originating in its rigid obligation-construal: The morality system simply dictates that if one does not act out of pure obligation, it must be mere inclination.

Attempting to manoeuvre around this "intimidating structure that morality has made out of the idea of obligation" (Williams, 1985, p. 182), Williams addresses the

general notion of 'importance'. Stressing that "each person has a life to lead" (p. 186), he suggests the idea that *moral* importance is merely one among many other kinds of importance (such as aesthetic importance). These realms in life derive their ranking of importance through an individual's deliberation. While Williams admits that there are also things that are 'important *überhaupt*' (e.g.: helping people in emergencies), he tries to shed light on how people value the things in their world by assigning them importance through 'deliberative priority' in their day-to-day context: "A consideration has high deliberative priority for us if we give it heavy weighting against other considerations in our deliberations". From this perspective, the morality system loses its authoritarian role, as it is people's activity of assigning priority through deliberation that the moral system cannot respect. As Williams puts it: "[T]he morality system is closed in on itself" (p. 195).

With this introduction, I hope to have given an impression of how the rigorous workings of the morality system that we find in our modern age, assume a type of self that one simply will not find in one's day-to-day life, a self that is completely disconnected from any 'lived-experience'.[4] Williams (1985), for his part then, rejects the 'peculiar system' its strict notion of obligation, and advocates people's concerns *besides* morality. He does, however, emphasise with regard to urgent but far away problems[5], that "[w]e should not banish the category of immediacy, but we must consider what for us, in the modern world, should properly count as immediacy, and what place we have in our lives for such concerns when they are not obligations" (p. 186). It is for this process, in which people consider what counts for them as of immediate importance in their lives and what does not, that I would like to suggest a narrative approach in this thesis.

With regard to my method, this project could be seen as an attempt to enrich the climate debate with a plea for a widening of the ethical discussion by means of a narrative approach. I will make a reconstruction on the basis of literature from the phenomenological- and hermeneutic critique of the scientific-theoretical presuppositions in the modern discourse.

In the first chapter, I will defend the aforementioned narrativity thesis against

4 I will elaborate on this in §1.2.
5 Such as climate change, on my reading.

the criticisms of Galen Strawson (§1.1 & 1.2) and expose Charles Taylor's critique of modernity's epistemological construal and its notion of the self (§1.3). Hoping to have defended the narrativity thesis in the first chapter properly, in the second chapter I will illustrate what its significance is with regard to motivating people for the collective change in lifestyle that is required for mitigating climate change (§2.1 & §2.2). Subsequently, I will suggest that an implicit negation of the significance of stories in Western society in general, is the result of a long tradition that has its roots in ancient Greece (§2.3). Chapter two will be concluded with a critical analysis of the 'Anthropocene narrative', as I hold it to be the most dominant and influential frame of climate change in Western society (§2.4). In the third and last chapter, I will examine what a paradigmatic interpretation of the narrativity thesis could possibly yield, by proposing the adaptation of Walter Fisher's 'narrative paradigm'. I will sketch the paradigm's outlines (§3.1), explain how its 'narrative rationality' helps to avoid a relativism of narratives (§3.2) and conclude by showing how the narrative paradigm broadens the scope of public moral argument and public debate in general (§3.3). Eventually, I will answer my research question by claiming that, albeit I have merely made a very rough first sketch, the narrativity thesis could indeed enrich the climate debate.

Chapter 1

As announced in the introduction, I will begin my argument by defending the narrativity thesis as formulated by Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 book 'After Virtue':

> "[M]an is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (2007, p. 216).

§1.1 - Strawson's argument against narrative self-understanding

The most important and prominent figure in what could be seen as 'the narrativity debate', is Galen Strawson. In his 2004 essay 'Against Narrativity', he fiercely argues that perceiving oneself as a character living through either one unified story or a multiplicity of stories, is not universal to begin with and also by no means necessary in order to constitute a stable self with a moral life. In order to make his argument, Strawson draws a distinction between the psychological narrativity thesis and the ethical narrativity thesis in the debate about narrativity. The psychological narrativity thesis largely entails descriptive statements about how humans understand their lives and their place in the world, namely as being a character in one or more enacted narratives. The ethical narrativity thesis denotes the claim to the moral significance of, as argued by authors such as MacIntyre, perceiving one's life as one unified narrative. Strawson rejects both. Actually, it seems to him that "MacIntyre, Taylor and other supporters of the ethical narrativity thesis are really just talking about themselves" (p. 437) and their own specific self-understanding.

Regarding the psychological version, Strawson endorses the view of protagonist Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's 1938 novel *La Nausée*. With his narrative, Sartre tries to suggest that although it may be that humans attempt to make sense of the world 'out there' through narration, there is a primordial level of experience that is non-narrative. Concealing that primordial experience through the simplifying activity of narration

causes one to ultimately lead an unauthentic life[6]: a defect that one ought to overcome and Roquentin's realisation of which leads to a feeling of loathing. With regard to this Sartrean account of selfhood, MacIntyre (2007) argues, that it is actually "highly characteristic of the modes of thought and practice of modernity" (p. 204-5).[7] Yet, Strawson (2004) does not refer to Sartre because he endorses an existentialist account of reality per se. Rather, he refers to Sartre's novel in order to illustrate how someone could possibly recognise a narrative tendency in one's self-understanding and *reject* it for its alleged falsifying effects on the perception of reality.

Strawson (2004) draws another distinction between people as being either a 'diachronic' or an 'episodic'. A diachronic person, on his account, "naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (p. 430). To eventually be regarded a *narrative*-diachronic by Strawson, requires a degree of form-finding tendency: "some sort of relatively large-scale coherence-seeking, unity-seeking, pattern-seeking" (p. 441) tendency of a person with regard to one's life experiences (i.e.: the construction of either one unifying-, or multiple narratives). Contrarily, an episodic person would experience no continuity of her self through time, thus not potentially leading to a narrative self-understanding. To illustrate what 'episodicity' would entail, Strawson mentions his own first-person, from-the-inside, memory of falling out of a boat as a small kid. He says that he does not experience any connection from his current self to that self in the past. Therefore he has with this discontinuous, episodic self, so he argues, a fundamentally different kind of self-understanding than a so-called diachronic would have. Strawson proceeds by claiming that it would be positively more desirable for one to be an episodic, since he holds that a diachronic would tend to falsify his experiences of the world through narration. The retelling, recalling and articulating of one's experiences does, so he writes, "almost always more harm than good" (p. 447), because this reconstructing when narrating those past life events, would with many (although not all) people bring about a great risk of reducing the factual accuracy. By telling and retelling one's past, the 'truth of one's being' would be

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[6] In other words: by construing a meaning-giving story about one's choices that 'explains' them and makes them intelligible, the person denies its absolute freedom, leading to a typical example of Sartrean 'bad faith'.

[7] This critique I will develop further in §1.3.

altered and deteriorated. In a footnote he mentions that “a truly gifted therapist” may be able to reconstruct one’s life narrative ‘correctly’ (p. 437). But then, one could ask, by what standard should the ‘correctness’ of a personal *meaning-giving* story be judged?

It seems to me that Strawson and MacIntyre differ in their notion of narrative. If one would follow Strawson’s emphasis on truth with regard to narratives (‘narration would greatly risk falsifying the truth’), he would end up with the concept of a chronicle: a summing up of past events in chronological, yet *meaningless*, order. But not only is a chronicle meaningless, Strawson also necessarily assumes, something I will get back to later on, a world ‘out there’ and ‘as such’ that would thus be at risk of becomming distorted when narrated about. MacIntyre’s (2007) insistence on the importance of narratives to the contrary, has primarily to do with their meaning-giving role. Narratives can be distinguished from chronicles, by virtue of their making the world intelligible by connecting life events, experiences or ‘episodes’ over time in such a way that they are understood to be either promoting or disturbing a certain goal, or *telos*. (p. 217). Thus, Strawson seems to (mistakenly) interpret the narrativity thesis as an empirical claim about narrative as something fundamental for epistemology. Some thinkers, like Dennet, White or Mink, *do* interpret narrativity as an epistemological tool to make the chaotic (outside) world with its ‘raw’ impressions intelligible. Such a conception, by putting the locus of truth in narration, renders narration an epistemological method indeed (Meretoja, 2014, p. 95). Such an understanding of narrativity is in no way what I am arguing for here. As I will elaborate on in the next section and in other parts of this thesis, I hold narration to be *interdependent* with truth-finding epistemology: Without facts, there is nothing to give meaning to in the first place, and without a meaningful, narrative embedment, facts cannot make sense.

With regard to the idea that self-narration has relevance to ethics, Strawson (2004) writes that although he does not care in any way about what his current self has achieved in life so far, he holds that he does feel responsibility in a moral sense: “The way I am now is profoundly shaped by my past, but it is only the present shaping consequences of the past that matter, not the past as such” (p. 438). Strawson argues that in this way, he has rejected the idea that narration is a prerequisite for ethics. But one should recall that he, something maybe even more pressing, actually makes a

normative claim himself by (in a Sartrean spirit) emphatically preferring an episodic- over a diachronic self-understanding by virtue of its alleged relation to truth. In the next section, I will argue against this idea that suppressing narration would grant more room for truth to reveal itself. To the contrary, I will hold that narration provides the means for truth to become significant and meaningful in the first place.

§1.2 - 'Meaning versus truth', a correct dichotomy?

Throughout his entire argument, Strawson seems to make an implicit ontological assumption about what it means to be human and what is real in general (Meretoja, 2014). By speaking of 'present shaping consequences', Strawson takes past events to have a meaning of themselves, even when they are cut loose from their context (hence: 'past as such'). He can then make the claim that an episodic disposition is ethically more desirable, for it would be more obedient to the order and meaning of the world 'out there'. It is this idea suggested by Strawson that there exists 'life as it is' in a primordial way and that narration is an optional and potentially distorting secondary activity, that I strongly oppose. Contrary to his approach that gives an overriding primacy to epistemology; I will argue, in what follows, for a perspective on human narration as being bound up with a hermeneutic understanding of persons (Fisher, 1987; Rudd, 2009; Meretoja, 2014).

Rejecting the idea that there is 'a world out there', that provides us with neutral experience as such, the hermeneutic tradition stresses the idea that the world influences us as much as we influence the world. Hence, human experience is always synthetically constituted through a perpetuating flux between the interpretation of past and present experiences. This interpretive process is ubiquitous: one finds oneself to be engaged in it, as soon as one objectifies an experience by placing it before himself. Thereby, experience is also always culturally and historically mediated (Meretoja, 2014, p. 96). Accordingly, this directly refutes the Cartesian idea that the human subject is granted *un*-mediated access to the truth of a factual outside world that is given to it in a neutral way. With regard to Strawson (2004), this relates to his implicit claim that it would be possible to let one's experiences and memories - such as his childhood boat-memory - 'as they are', by abstaining from narrating about them.

Rather, the very fact *that* Strawson recalls his boat-experience, already bears a certain kind of significance: 'Why does he actually recall *that* experience at this specific moment, instead of recalling himself as a child on a playground?' In light of hermeneutics then, narration gets a different meaning: "the narrative interpretation of experiences is an endless process in which the past is constantly re-narrated in relation to the present and future and narrative is only one of the many modes in which we make sense of our experiences" (Meretoja, 2014, p. 101).

As I mentioned before, I hold epistemology and narration to be interdependent: Without facts, nothing is to be made intelligible and sensible, while at the same time, without a narrative embedding, those facts can have no meaningful and intelligible status. However, narration is no unconstrained activity. Factual circumstances determine for a large part what stories can and cannot be told. To see this, let us take the instance of a football match. At first, our match exists as a series of mostly contingent happenings that result in a certain outcome: a loss. While drinking a beer in the canteen afterwards, our team can only narrate about this match in a limited way: Because since the actual *facts* state that our opponent scored two times and our team did not score at all, it would be obviously false to start telling a story about a great victory.[8] Trying to make sense of our loss, we could, for instance, regard it as an important wakeup-call for our team to train better. This would, in turn, be a means to try to achieve the main goal of the team's narrative (eventually winning the competition). In this sense, the correct role of narration is the giving of meaning to experiences and events, not the 'making up of fictional stories from imaginary elements'. Moreover, it would be virtually impossible for our team to regard the lost match 'as such', as it is part of our lives, our lived experience. Such an attitude is of course technically possible, because we could *believe* that a rational and indifferent disposition towards this past event would make up for a more plausible account. Yet, this would then rather entail a chronicle than a narrative, such as a reconstruction in a legal case. It is also more probable for a complete outsider to regard our loss 'as such'

[8] 'Victory' to be read in the usual sense here. Of course, one could also retrospectively narrate about the *technically* lost match to be a 'victory' after all, because it was a *moral* victory, or 'we have won after all because we learned from it' and so forth. In such cases, those more ambiguous narrations are still constrained by demands for substantiation of course. Albeit by elements that are less universally shared (in opposition to what a 2-0 victory in football commonly entails).

than for our team. Thus with regard to the discussion in this chapter, embedding the event of the lost match in a narrative form, functions to render it meaningful. I do want to stress, however, in spite of the above example, that I do not want to argue that humans first live and only retrospectively project their stories onto the world, constrained by certain factual circumstances. Rather, the world as we conceptualise it in our day-to-day experience is primordially captured in broader personal as well as cultural-narrative terms. We reciprocally relate with those 'grand cultural narratives' by keeping up a dialogical relation through our own personal narratives: setting goals to achieve in the future, 'having something to live for'. With regard to the football-example, the very practice of football itself existed long before any of the players was even born: it has been embedded in their culture for many years. In the words of MacIntyre (2007): "The characters of course never start ab initio; they plunge in media res, the beginnings of their story already made for them by what and who has gone before" (p. 215).

However, the hermeneutical tradition, by moving beyond MacIntyre, gives to the case for narration a dimension even more profound "in the sense that [narratives] are interpretations of experiences which are *already* interpretations: they weave together experiences by showing how they are related and by creating meaningful connections between them" (Meretoja, 2014, p. 98, italics mine). Meretoja refers to Paul Ricoeur, who shows that there is a process of simultaneously constructing meaningful connections in the present, but at the same time re-articulating connections with the past.

So in this way, the self is continuously reconstructing itself in two ways (e.g.: why I am as I am now (objectively, factually), and why I am as I am now (meaningfully, narratively). As mentioned before, as soon as Strawson (2004) recalls his childhood event of falling out of the boat, he is already and unavoidably engaged in a subject-object relation to that, in a unique and personal way conceptualised memory. It may very well be that he does not interpret this event narratively and that it did not occur to what he conceives of as his current self, but this does not mean that diachronicity (with its tendency to narrate accordingly) is, therefore, a category strictly distinct from episodicity. Sticking to Strawson's own terms, a mostly episodic self should be explained as a self with a disposition to continuously re-articulate, reconstruct, re-

narrate itself. From this perspective, the sharp distinction between episodicity and diachronicity changes into a gradual scale between consciously or unconsciously narrating (i.e.: interpreting and meaning-giving) about one's experiences (coming to the subject from outside) or choices (made on the inside). Episodes still need narration as much as chronicles need them in order to be understood as meaningful (Hyvärinen, 2012).

With this distinct hermeneutic approach in mind, it can now be understood why Strawson (2004) thinks that the relevance of the narrativity thesis collapses into triviality if one stretches its conception 'too far': "[I]f someone says that making coffee is a narrative that involves narrativity, because you have to think ahead, do things in the right order, and so on, and that everyday life involves many such narratives, then I take it the claim is trivial" (p. 439). Yet to the contrary, I argue that exactly at this point the narrativity thesis proves its relevance, for it shows that just everything in our lives is in one way or another, comprehensible in a narrative form. By rejecting a 'coffee-narrative' for being trivial, Strawson seems to imply that there would be a certain threshold across which the concept of narratives would start to matter, or become un-trivial. I rather hold that there simply does not exist such a threshold and that people in their day-to-day practice are always interwoven with countless clusters of narratives, each of them embedded in its own bandwidth and context. Moreover, no narrative, regardless of its scope, would be intelligible without an embedding in other narratives. "A particular narrative may be very brief, but it can always be extended, either by going further back (or forward) in time, or by building in more detail. When one stops doing this is a pragmatic, contextual matter" (Rudd, 2009, p. 64). James Phelan (2005) (a self-proclaimed episodic following Strawson), formulates why he thinks that narration can still be of added value: "[N]arrative functions for me as a valuable tool for trying out explanations and understandings of the ongoing stream of my experiences. Even though I never reach a single coherent [overarching] narrative, and any small narrative I settle on is provisional, this process enables me to convert my life from one damn thing after another to more manageable clusters of events and their significances" (p. 209). However, narration not only provides meaning to experiences in retrospect, it is also fundamental for an action to be initiated and intelligibly executed in the first place. In §2.1, I will elaborate on this role of narrative with regard to action.

Comparing Strawson's strict distinction between reality 'as such' and narration, with MacIntyre's ontological view that narration is human's primary way of *giving meaning*, we can see that although some people may not deliberately and consciously engage in self-narration, they still live their life through narratives (as distinct from a chain of causal events 'as such'). Since we have now also seen that with hermeneutics, experience prior to narration is not some stream of 'raw data', it becomes difficult to reasonably doubt the narrativity thesis. In the next and last section of this chapter, I will attempt to characterize Strawson's position as one being typical for modernity.

§1.3 - Modernity's self, Strawson's self?

In his critique of the modern fragmented self with its lack of unity, MacIntyre (2007) distinguishes two obstacles that obstruct a unified, narrative, understanding of the self: a social- and a philosophical obstacle. The social obstacle entails the idea that in modern Western society, most people do not experience their lives as a unity because it is fragmented in multiple segments and relations, each with its own modes of behaviour and rules: "[W]ork is separated from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal" (p. 204). It is then through the predetermined roles that people occupy in these subdivisions of society, that they are taught to think, feel and act. The philosophical negation of a human life's wholeness originates in two tendencies: One mainly originating in analytical philosophy and the other in existentialism and social theory. As for the analytical tendency, it is what MacIntyre calls the 'atomistic' way of interpreting and analysing human actions and analysing complex situations in terms of simple components. The notion that particular events and actions derive their meaning from their embedment in larger wholes is thus alien to the modern way of thinking. With regard to the second, existentialist, cause, MacIntyre writes that it is the tendency of (mistakenly) drawing a sharp distinction between 'the' individual and the (false) roles it plays that makes room for the negation of a unified-narrative-self (pp. 204-5). As we saw in §1.1, Strawson does indeed follow this Sartrean, existentialist, understanding of a person as something being there prior to narration. In order to push forward the critique of this modern understanding of the

human subject, I will now discuss Charles Taylor's 1995 chapter 'Overcoming Epistemology'.

In his analysis of what he calls 'the epistemological construal of modernity', Taylor (1995) characterises this epistemological construal, mainly originating from the philosophy of Descartes, as having a privileged status, a primacy, over all other ways of interacting with the world. He holds that this primacy is actually unjustified, because the properties of the very subject that the construal has to assume in order to be functional in the first place, cannot be examined by this same construal. Taylor argues so, by critically investigating certain implicit notions about science and the nature of human agency. He identifies three fundamental assumptions about the modern subject to be at the root of this modern epistemology:

- The disentangled subject: "free and rational, fully distinguished from the natural and social world".
- The punctual self: "free and rational to treat this world, and even some features of his own character- instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganizing in order the better to secure the welfare of himself and others".
- Atomism: "the social consequence of the first two: an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes" (par. 22).

These assumptions then lead to the epistemological construal that can be formulated as follows:

> "(a) [I]deas [about the world] are self-enclosed, in the sense that they can be accurately identified and described in abstraction from the "outside" world; and (b) they nevertheless point toward and represent things in that outside world" (par. 29).

Accordingly, this model entails the idea that "knowledge is to be seen as a correct interpretation [by the human mind] of an independent reality" (par. 7) and for such a correct interpretation, a rigorous methodology for the mind is necessary. Without the

three assumptions and their combination, there would be no unquestionable basis for the shared standard of undeniable clarity that is required for modern science.

Seen from this point of view, Strawson's reasons for rejecting the narrativity thesis can be reconstructed and criticized, because from the perspective of the epistemological construal, narration can indeed be seen as an activity that merely blurs the perception of an independent reality 'as such', of a world 'out there'. Namely, narration does in no way relate to a so-called 'rigorous methodology for the mind'. Not surprisingly, Taylor writes that challenging the aforementioned assumptions that are at the root of modern epistemology is enormously difficult since they are "connected with some of the most important moral and spiritual ideas of our civilization - and also with some of the most controversial and questionable. The epistemological tradition stands with them in a complex relation of mutual support" (par. 24). Being interrelated with a great societal- and cultural importance, the notion of an individual's freedom and autonomy is obviously very strong in this epistemological construal too.

The critique of modern epistemology has its origin in a Kantian argument which Taylor calls 'the argument from transcendental conditions' (par. 27). In short, the argument points at the inability of the epistemological construal to investigate the properties of its own (necessarily) assumed subject. Several philosophers, like Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, departed from the notion of this 'blind spot' and formulated their critique of this epistemological tradition. Eventually entering the field of ontology, and mainly focussing on Heidegger, Taylor explains the implications of this critique and the importance of being able to investigate the human subject. The Heideggerian formulation of the 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) points towards the notion "that the knower-known complex *is* at all rather than taking the knower for granted as 'subject' and examining what makes it possible to have any knowledge or experience of a world" (par. 28). Phrased differently: Heidegger tries to show that the knower of something (i.e.: the subject) needs to *be*, in a certain way, in the first place. The clearing is thus the place that makes it possible for anything to appear at all. Since this clearing is *primordial* to the subject that the modern epistemological construal needs to assume in order to be functional, the epistemological construal cannot conceptualise it and set it before itself.

At this stage in the argument, the three intertwined foundational assumptions of the epistemological construal begin to crumble as it has now become evident that the facticity of human existence unavoidably starts a hermeneutic cycle in which one is always already coping- and 'coming at grips' with the world. This empirical and direct interaction with the world is inherent in- and essential to, the forming of any epistemological point of view. Accordingly, the attempts of disengaged description within the epistemological construal is to be seen as a mechanism, a special possibility of the emerging subject, but not as 'a view from nowhere'. What this perspective implies, is then by no means a refutation of modern epistemology in its totality. Rather, it provides a clarification of what man could be *as* a knowing being, at the same time renouncing the idea that there exists an a-historical, fundamental definition of man.[9] This project of critically analysing how we deal with the world in its totality around us, could be understood as giving a new meaning and impulse to Descartes' emphasis on self-responsibility (par. 19). Yet, "[this] project of articulating them fully is an essentially incoherent one, just because any articulate project would itself rely on a background or horizon of non-explicit engagement with the world" (par. 35).

Having drawn this conclusion, Taylor claims that this leads us to "conceive reason differently, as including a new department, whose excellence consists in our being able to articulate the background of our lives perspicuously" (par. 46). It is a narrative approach that I will suggest to be the appropriate means for this enterprise of articulating that background of people's lives. With regard to moral thought in general, Taylor's argument has contributed to the emergence of a critique with regard to ethical theories like deontology and consequentialism, for these theories assume a self that is much like the punctual notion of the subject by virtue of which modernity's epistemological construal operates. As could already be recognised in Williams' argument that I developed by way of a starting point in the introduction, this results in such moral theories being cut loose from people's day-to-day coping with the world or lived experience. With regard to my argument so far, I hope to have convincingly shown that narration is indeed a fundamental mode of people's interacting with the world and that it is modernity with its epistemological construal that implicitly suppresses and negates this tendency by rendering narration as something falsifying

[9] This conclusion, that there is no 'man as such', will especially become relevant in §2.4.

instead of *enabling* truth and meaning. Strawson's notion of the self can then indeed be regarded as typically modern.

What I will be concerned with in the following chapter, as a next step in my thesis, is the suggested gap between on the one hand the modern moral theorising with its general obligations and on the other, the relation of the public to the primarily academic discourse on the ethics of climate change (Kamminga, 2008). I will try to argue that the prevalence of modern science in public discourse and its requirements to rationality in particular, result in the assessment of much public argument as being irrational and not relevant for politics and policy. The contemporary dismissive attitude towards any notion of narrative as being relevant to sound public deliberation and motivation, subsequently seems to lead to a missed potential of appealing to people and to reasons and considerations latent in their lived experience in order to motivate them for significant climate action.

Chapter 2

As we saw in the introduction, Bernard Williams (1985) criticises Kantianism and utilitarianism, for their way of starting out of morality as obvious, while to Williams it is a 'peculiar system'. I understand his criticism to refer to ethical theorists' omission to acknowledge people's day-to-day life with all of its concerns *besides* morality; it rather understands itself as overriding, monolithic and absolute. I would like to follow Williams' statement that "almost all worthwhile human life lies between the extremes that morality puts before us" (p. 195). Hoping to have defended the narrativity thesis in the previous chapter convincingly, in this chapter, I will take it as a point of departure and argue for its relevance with regard to the climate debate.

§2.1 - Narrative theory of action: agent-specific- instead of agent-neutral reasons to act

Already pointed out in the previous chapter, the narrativity thesis entails that humans essentially conceive of themselves as characters in an enacted narrative[10] and ascribe meaning to their lives accordingly. Yet, at the same time, people are far from being the authors of their own life stories: A narrative is lived before it is told. As MacIntyre (2007) illustrates, the 'key question' for humankind in order to know what to do is: "Of what stories do I find myself a part?" (p. 216). Since it is through stories that people interpret their life situation (i.e.: situate themselves), it is essential to know in what narrative, with its according *telos*, someone finds himself to be a character in, if one tries to understand that person's behaviour. Consider this: 'What is Harry doing?' 'He is finishing his sentence; in order to complete his paragraph; to eventually complete his philosophy thesis; because he wants to graduate', and so forth. This example illustrates that the intention for an action can only be made intelligible, if the intention on the *next* larger scale, of which that action is a part, is known. Every circumscribed action has its own goal. Proceeding such questioning about someone's intentions will lead to increasingly large structures that could eventually be called

[10] Narrative understood as a temporal structure with a beginning, middle and end ('end' as in goal, horizon).

‘cultural’ or ‘societal’. Then, Harry tries to graduate because he aspires a job; which is because he eventually wants to settle down in order to start a family, and so forth.

At this point, a (non-narrative) moral theorist would probably remark that the reasons for Harry’s behaviour do by no means have to originate in some narrative embedment. To the contrary then: Harry would rationally derive his reasons to act from an agent-neutral conception of the good. However, such thinking is typical for modern moral theorising, as it suggests that Harry decides what to do on the basis of some neutral, ethical standard. Rather, I hold that Harry ‘has his life to live’. But let us suppose for the sake of argument that, at some point, Harry becomes aware of the fact that his personal plans would actually evoke someone else to get severely hurt if he would continue the pursuit of his goal(s). Whether he would accordingly terminate his plans in order to avoid that person to get hurt, then depends on the place that ‘helping someone in an emergency’ or ‘being a good person’ have in Harry’s life narrative. His eventual behaviour in another situation, in which he would discover that his activities are causing some severe pollution elsewhere, is also to be made more intelligible through a narrative lens. The theorist could reply here that this is simply his ‘valuing’ of the outcomes of these situations. I agree, but I hold that it is a narrative perspective that makes intelligible why, and how, Harry values these.

The aforementioned chain of behaviour and intention can be approached in two ways: Either as the role it has in Harry’s personal narrative, or its relation to the larger[11] history of the ‘Setting’[12] to which it belongs. Would he continue his thesis writing if he became convinced that his studies would not plausibly lead to him acquiring a job? This depends on whether the intention of acquiring a job is primary, since it could just as well be the case that Harry happens to participate in the NCRA speed-writing contest and (rather oddly) believes that the subject of his thesis is the perfect training material. Since these two narratives, each with their *telos* (‘graduation, job, family, (…)’ and ‘NCRA-trophy, fame, (…)’) in which Harry finds himself to be ‘set’, both with their own histories, happen to intersect, it is important to determine what his *primary*

[11] Here I hold that helping someone in an absolute emergency, is what Williams (1985) in the introduction called ‘important *überhaupt*’.
[12] Setting (with capital-S for clarity) is to be understood here as the broad, general term for an institution, practice, milieu etc. In any case, central to the notion of a Setting is that it has a history within which the histories of individual agents have to be situated in order to be intelligible (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 206).

intention is. Thus, would Harry become convinced that his philosophy studies will eventually drive him to the gutter of society rather than make him a millionaire, it might just as well turn out to be the case that he would simply continue to write his thesis, if it is the case that winning the NCRA-trophy happens to be his primary intention.

Although I do not want to claim that consequentialism and deontology ban every notion of 'reasons for actions', it *does* seem to be the case that those theories, generally speaking, objectify the moral behaviour they prescribe in causal structures, thus making them agent-neutral. So according to a consequentialist or utilitarian, the only reason for action that any agent would have is the maximisation of his pleasure: personal projects are not to be recognised.[13] The typical Kantian on the other hand, seems to assume that an agent's actions are determined by the extent to which he or she 'values' being morally good by subordinating to the moral law. In any case, these theories seem to shortcut an agent's more personal, agent-relative, (narrative) reasons and conceptualise ideal moral behaviour in terms of actions 'as such'. I will now turn towards this notion, and try to argue that an action 'as such' can exist in theory, but not in the real world.

MacIntyre (2007) notes that at first sight, there might be instances of genuine actions 'as such', like the steps that one has to take in order to follow a recipe in a cookery book: 'take three eggs, break them into a bowl, add flour…' and so forth. However, the problematic point about such sequences is that each of their elements taken apart (to be 'as such'), can *solely* be understood as 'a possible-element-in-a-sequence', nothing more (p. 209). To illustrate this, MacIntyre sketches the situation in which he would, just in the middle of one of his lectures on Kantian ethics, take three eggs and break them in a bowl. In other words: Conceptualising actions or events 'as such', neglects their possible embedment into a broader context of intention and thus robs them of their intelligibility and meaning. So even if we would take it to be correct that narration is essentially falsifying truth (as Strawson suggested in his argument in chapter 1), then what would an un-narrated world with its events 'as such' look like?

[13] For an interesting attempt to cope with this in consequentialism, see: Pettit, P. (2012). The inescapability of consequentialism. *Luck, value and commitment: Themes from the ethics of Bernard Williams*, pp. 41-70.

MacIntyre holds that this is simply not even imaginable: “[T]he characterisation of actions *allegedly* prior to any narrative form being imposed upon them [(‘as such’)] will always turn out to be the presentation of what are plainly the disjointed parts of some possible narrative. (...) There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future always presents itself in the form of a *telos* - or of a variety of ends or goals - towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present” (pp. 215-6, italics mine). From this perspective, mainstream climate ethics seems to be presenting, in the form of their according moral obligations and constraints, their ideal actions in theory, ‘as such’, to be performed by the addressed agents in order to serve a *telos* of ‘saving the planet’. With the narrative approach that I argue for, can thus be seen what is problematic about this way of operating: People’s personal projects and their *‘teloi’* (to be understood as narratives being lived out) are being ignored by these mainstream ethical theories. Rather, the sustaining of our planet’s current climate should be presented as a precondition for people to live their lives in a meaningful way, and not as an absolute all-overriding goal. Since, as I have argued for, narrativity is fundamental to sensible and intelligible human action, people’s actions should be scrutinised and guided accordingly instead of stricly (moral) theoretically. In the next section, I will make an attempt to illustrate how the telling of stories could provide a more appropriate means to motivate people to make the substantial changes in their way of living that are required.

§2.2 - Motivating people through stories

In the previous section, I showed how the embedment of someone’s life narrative into a larger shared narrative (or history) constitutes this person’s Setting and thus motivates the behaviour of the person. However, this embedment does not reject the notion of any moral progress. Rather, “it is in moving forward from such [moral] particularities that the search for the good, the universal, consists” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 221). Yet, MacIntyre warns for a *complete* obliteration of moral particularities, recognisable in for instance Kantianism’s “escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such”, as people then “usually behave worse than they would otherwise do” (p. 221). To wit, this would simply accelerate modern

individualism's fragmentation of people's situatedness, moral coherence and with it, reduce the intelligibility of actions. A way in between has thus to be found, because human beings can be held accountable for that of which they consider themselves to be the authors (p. 209).

Like Arran Gare (1998), I believe that "MacIntyre provides the means to diagnose how people are oriented to living in an environmentally destructive way" (p. 4). As I suggested near the end of the previous section, the moral obligations and constraints[14] that often follow from mainstream environmental ethics are deprived of any narrative context, they are generally difficult for people to directly follow up. Referring to the aforementioned example of MacIntyre breaking three eggs in a bowl during his Kant-lecture: It would be equally absurd if he would suddenly order his audience to perform that same action, just while the audience is in the midst of scribbling their notes. 'How do you imagine us to do that?', they would probably reply. Since they are sitting in a lecture hall instead of standing in their kitchen with the goal (or *telos*) of baking a cake, they do not find themselves *situated* in the right way. So in case of moral obligations, the lecturer could be seen as the mainstream environmental ethicist and the audience as society. Of course, this example is far from perfect, but what it tries to show is the assumed subject that is being addressed in both situations: Both the lecturer and the environmental ethicist seem to ignore the importance of the people's Setting.[15] From such a perspective, the theoretical enterprise of mainstream environmental ethics could then be regarded 'a peculiar institution' indeed (to use Williams' words), since it seems to assume that all people regard the morality system and its obligations as of ultimate importance in their lives. Generally speaking, people *do* know that much of the consumption choices (like meat eating and flying) embedded in their daily life are directly part of inducing climate change. Yet, at the same time, most of them do not drastically change their behaviour and lifestyle

[14] Such as 'one ought to stop eating meat' or 'one ought to abstain from travelling by aircraft' (these are of course examples of obligations in their most extreme sense, but that is for the sake of illustration).

[15] With regard to sustainable consumerism, Dagevos and De Bakker (2012) identify the 'reflexive consumer' as a subject: A type of citizen who, more or less in the background, evaluates the legitimacy of the claims of the many groups positioned around particular product issues (e.g.: sustainability) and evaluate their own activities based on what they think is the legitimacy of those claims in relation to their own position in life (i.e.: Setting). This 'reflexive consumer' would then be the counterpart of the 'political'- and 'ethical' consumer: people who consume primarily sustainably, respectively out of activist or moral (in the strict rational-ethical sense) motives.

subsequently.[16] Instead of drawing the conclusion that this state of inaction must then be due to these people simply not valuing such environmental concerns enough to act upon, I suggest that there is a way in which a better insight could be obtained into the realm of people's deliberations in order to address this motivational deficit of the mainstream ethical theorising: a narrative approach.

It is, as I will argue now, the development of alternative stories in order to influence the traditions and practices of people's day-to-day life and Setting, which could meet this motivational lacuna in the climate ethical debate. The typical merit of a narrative approach is namely that it, instead of merely stressing and repeating a same outcome of a moral theory, justified by it, over and over again, recognises and acknowledges people's lived experience and takes their Setting into account. Take for instance the habit of eating meat: this is something that people not only do because they like the taste, it is also strongly embedded in their cultural narratives. Think about eating turkey at the Christmas dinner, the general practice of cooking with its long tradition of dishes that include meat, or people going to a restaurant to celebrate some event and ordering a steak because they 'deserved it'. Intercontinental tourism, or travelling by aircraft in general, could be seen as other examples of traditions with a narrative history around them that only barely acknowledges the environmentally destructive effects that they bring about. To the contrary, the stories typical for tourism are often associated with freedom and a break with all the (moral) constraints and obligations of daily life. I hold that there are much more examples like these and that there are actually only few situations in which people's projects and actions are motivated by strict moral deliberation. By virtue of their ability to show people alternatives to their current ways of living that are less environmentally harmful by setting different 'plots', stories are essential for effectively questioning and criticising people's habits, practices and traditions. Such 'counter-narratives', by creating quasi-worlds, allow people to distance themselves from the stories they are currently living out and question those by comparing them. As Gare (2001) writes: "Narrated stories enable people to envisage in an immediate, practical way, new possibilities, new identities, new goals, new communities, new ways of living and the paths to realizing

[16] For one of many intriguing studies on this so-called 'attitude-behavioural intention gap', see Vermeir and Verbeke (2006).

such possibilities" (p. 2).

For an example of providing such different perspectives on environmentally destructive practices, one could look at the writings of Dutch journalist Jelmer Mommers. In his articles, Mommers often writes about his own feelings and lived experiences with regard to climate change and severely polluting practices like meat eating and flying. In an article about the aircraft industry (Mommers, 2018), he explains with the use of many lively comparisons and visualisations, the severity of the environmental destructiveness of flying. Subsequently, he puts emphasis on the significance of choosing another means of transportation than travelling by aircraft. At some point, Mommers even writes that "[f]lying is deadly for the planet". Besides the fact that as a result of interaction with his readers even a new word for people who quitted flying was figured out ('planetarian'), many readers came about with their own stories about how they reduced or stopped their travelling by aircraft. Subsequently, these accounts would "show that voluntarily restricting our mobility may not be the great loss that some fear" (Mommers, e-mail newsletter, June 15, 2018).

Storytelling seems to hold the potential for illustrating the negative and positive results of individual human behaviour, by appealing to their imagination and lived experience (Gare, 1998, 2001, 2002; Westerhoff & Robinson, 2013; Bushell, Workman & Colley, 2016). Although MacIntyre (2007) has developed a detailed account of 'practices' as something that seems to get close to a conceptual tool for analysing forms of collective behaviour, I regard it as too narrow and specific to be applicable to instances of unsustainable behaviour. Instead, I will mainly follow Lisa Westerhoff and John Robinson (2013) and their notion of 'social practices' as a means to illustrate the transformative potential of narratives for motivating people to act in a more sustainable way. Westerhoff and Robinson define social practices as "the collections of objects, technologies, skills, knowledge, institutions, rules and meanings that constitute society, that are negotiated and reinvented over time" (p. 11). As they have a history, social practices can be regarded as stories themselves, albeit on a higher, more overarching level and thus as emerging from people's experiential activities and habitual routines. These are in their turn part of complex and overarching socio-cultural systems. With regard to narrative theory of action as explained in the previous section, this can be seen as a way to identify Harry's Setting from the example.

Since human behaviour is motivated by the stories that humans find themselves in, the added value of understanding social practices with regard to motivating people through alternative narratives is that it helps to "visualise, either literally or figuratively, how these might look, work or feel" (Westerhoff & Robinson, 2013, p. 13). What is also typical for the narrative approach towards motivating people for climate action, is that it does not present climate change as the one and only issue for which all other things that people value in their life have to give way. Rather, sustainability would be presented as a concern that is prerequisite for the more ultimate goal of the flourishing of human and other life. At the same time, a narrative approach allows concepts like 'climate change', 'sustainability' or 'transformation' to be continuously contested by critically questioning their meaning and role in stories. I already mentioned that MacIntyre (2007) wrote that human beings could be held accountable for that of which they consider themselves to be the authors of (p. 209). Thus, giving people authorship by appropriately situating them in climate change through narratives, should therefore happen in a 'polyphonic' instead of a 'monophonic' way: Rather than narrating in the form of an epic with only one protagonist and his goal, if stories are meant to genuinely address people, it is essential for them to include multiple contending voices and perspectives, because "these construe people as other conscious, active subjects" (Gare, 2001, p. 4). Simon Bushell, Mark Workman and Thomas Colley (2016) point into the same direction by recognising many people's tendency of "portraying climate change as someone else's problem" (p. 6) in order to deal with the dissonance they experience between their desires and the behavioural change that is expected from them (by the moral obligations and constraints following from environmental ethics). This 'othering', they argue, could indeed be dealt with through narratives in which those people find themselves represented. Because these narratives are never finished by virtue of having their existence in public discourse through an ongoing dialogue, they render people the characters and the authors at the same time, thus causing them to 'own' the problem (p. 8).

Yet, if such a plurality of polyphonic narratives is truly that important for people's action with regard to climate change, one may wonder why this approach is still to be regarded rather new and obscure. Gare (2001) explains this as follows: "[T]he dominant tenor, even of the major stories, has been to denigrate stories. Stories are a

sign of a deficiency and a reflection of the defective, unfinished state of the present, a present in which conflicts and diverse perspectives have yet to be resolved or exposed as illusions” (p. 3). As the kind of story that is discussed here Christianity’s quest for salvation could be a case in point. In the next section, I will thus argue that it has been the very *plot* of our Western culture’s ‘grand narrative’ to transcend the realm of narratives in its entirety in its quest for eternal truth and certainty. I will understand the term grand narrative here to refer to the largest scale of historical Setting which a society finds itself part of.[17]

§2.3 - The marginalisation of narratives throughout Western history

Although MacIntyre’s work has made much clear about the role that narratives have in people’s behaviour in my argument so far, he “has not examined the narratives unifying cultural traditions on a broad scale, the grand narratives which dominate civilizations, and so has not looked at the relationship between such grand narratives, traditions of enquiry and systematic philosophy … nor has he examined the concept of progress dominating the culture of modernity and the relationship between notions of economic progress, scientific progress and the progress of humanity” (Gare, 1998, p. 7). It is for that reason, that I will now follow Gare in his argument. Tracing back the tendency of ‘pushing stories to the margin’, to an argument of Parmenides in ancient Greece[18], Gare (2002) argues that nowadays, stories “are nothing more than decorations surrounding factual statements about the past” (p. 84). Subsequently, Gare writes, Plato took over Parmenides’ argument and accelerated the devaluation of stories and poetry by structurally framing them as merely dealing with ‘becoming’ (the illusionary, untrue) and emotions, at the same time contrasting them to mathematics and philosophy as leading to the eternal, the being, as their objects and thus truth. Gare subsequently writes that the synthesis of Plato’s thought with Hebraic thought, resulted in Hebrews’ primitive historical narratives. These narratives were eventually

[17] ‘Grand narrative’, or ‘meta-narrative’, is a concept brought to attention by Jean-François Lyotard in his 1979 book ‘The Postmodern Condition’ (1984).

[18] Parmenides argued that truth deals with *that what is* and that ‘change’ is an illusion: Change implies ‘becoming’ and ‘becoming’ originates in ‘not-being’ and the ‘not-being’ *is* not.

incorporated in Christianity, which made Christianity appealing to the mass. Yet, at the same time, these religious narratives (with their temporal essence) were nonetheless regarded to be subordinate to the eternal, the truth. But in Christian culture, the foundation of European civilisation, the coexistence of becoming (stories and myths) and the eternal (revelations and reason), was thus secured by virtue of the appeal that the numerous stories of Christianity had to the masses.

Gare (2002) argues that it was the Renaissance that brought an end to this situation. A 16th- and 17th century wickerwork of discoveries by Neoplatonists like Kepler, Newton and Galileo allowed the establishment of a historical junction, because their natural-scientific discoveries reaffirmed the idea of the prevalence of eternal knowledge in the unchanging order of the universe. With regard to this moment in history, MacIntyre (1977) shows the fundamental importance and presence of narrative in relation to the very historical devaluation of narrative itself. He explains why Galileo, with his discovery of the earth revolving around the sun, was superior over the other astronomers of his time:

> "[H]e, for the first time, enables the work of all his predecessors to be evaluated by a common set of standards; the history of late medieval science can finally be cast into a coherent narrative. Galileo's work implies a rewriting of the narrative, which constitutes the scientific tradition. (…) What [a] scientific genius, such as Galileo, achieves in his transitions, then, is not only a new way of understanding nature, but also and inseparably a new way of understanding the old science's way of understanding" (pp. 460 and 467).

This tries to show how narrativity played a crucial role in understanding scientific discoveries that changed entire worldviews. However, to this just mentioned idea that Galileo's discoveries 'implied a rewriting of the narrative', one could object that his work had nothing to do with stories and was just pure science, expressed in a theory. A contemporary example of such a theory might be something like 'the history of the universe': no intentional agents are involved and no values seem to be expressed. Yet, I hold that narration does start, as soon as one asks 'why?' Consider a modern physicist: In her daily work, she would use all kinds of formulas, data and theories (i.e.: facts) in

order to carry out her research and exchange ideas with her colleagues. Yet, as soon as she tries to express what those facts are actually *about* (even to herself), she would have to change her discourse by altering the set of symbols she uses in some way. To claim that this other set of symbols would directly make up for a narrative might go a bit too far. But still, if a layperson would ask her what 'all those numbers' are good for, she would have to come up with an account that both makes them *intelligible* and *meaningful* to that layperson. Her reply is what I would then consider a narration.[19] In other words: Without the narrative 'the history of the universe', the data, formulas, laws and so forth, would make no sense to, generally speaking, the public. Suppose that at some point, scientific discoveries are made that prove that our current ideas about how the universe came into existence are wrong on the theoretical level, resulting in a scientific paradigm shift. Besides such a shift, there would then occur a shift in the narrative too, because the 'old' narrative would not suffice anymore to make the 'new' facts meaningful and intelligible.[20] From this perspective, Galileo's findings can then indeed be regarded to have provided the means for a new and more plausible story that resulted in his success subsequently.[21]

Gare (2001) continues that retrospectively, the rise of new science, originating in Descartes' scientific method[22], can then be seen as not only "the move beyond myth, but also beyond philosophy, and the attainment of truly objective knowledge of the eternal laws of the motion of immutable matter" (p. 83).[23] Thus, although the influence of Galileo's discoveries through a more inclusive narrative can be regarded as a triumph for the significance of the narrative perspective, it is an ironical one because

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[19] To turn this the other way around, think about the event of an asteroid striking a farmer's barn. The farmer will start constructing a narrative about this event to make it intelligible and ascribe it, at least in some bare way, a meaning. The next day, a physicist will make a theoretical analysis of the event. The physicist would *then* not have to come up with a narrative about her collection of data, formulas, laws and so forth, because the event is already part of the farmer his lived experience: the event of the asteroid strike already makes sense to him, it is already part of his reality.

[20] Here, we can thus recognise again the interdependence between facts and narration as shown in the football-example of §1.2.

[21] If we now apply this idea to the situation of climate change, it becomes clear that what is needed is a narrative that at once incorporates the scientific data about climate change, and is at the same time constructed in such a way that it shows the meaning and significance of those data, to as many people as possible. This theme will recur throughout the rest of this thesis. In §3.2, I will show how a relativism of narratives could be avoided.

[22] And its corresponding subject leading to the epistemological construal of modernity as we saw in §1.3.

[23] An account (or narrative in this case) alike this, could, for instance, be found in Heidegger's 1938 essay 'The Age of the World Picture' (*Die Zeit des Weltbildes*). Heidegger writes: "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture" (Heidegger and Lovitt, 1977, p. 134).

this historical event shows how a narrative interpretation of the world resulted in a movement further away from change, from becoming, from narrative itself. The epistemological crave for certainty threw out the child with the bathwater: *finis narrationis*.

In his chapter '*How (not) to put an end to the end of times?*', Bruno Latour (2017) follows the same line of thought and can be regarded to reach a sortlike conclusion. Building on Stephen Toulmin and Eric Voegelin, he argues that it is this rendering the world immutable, which is the cause of people's apathy in their day-to-day lives with regard to the environmental crisis. The 'epistemological break', as Latour characterizes the emergence of modern science, has not only definitively banned the notion of narrative to the domains of rhetoric and aesthetics; it has also invoked Western people to negate the very historicity of their cultural existence.[24] One could, of course, object that this is not at all the case, by arguing that the very notion of 'the Anthropocene' is, in fact, an affirmation of our historicity. However, as I will argue more elaborately in the next section, the 'narrative' of the Anthropocene is actually a complete a-historical framing of the current climate change situation. As a result of the very presuppositions of natural-scientific means of enquiry (solely dealing with causes and effects), every notion of agency and thus also historicity is implicitly negated.

Latour (2017) explains people's apathetic attitude with regard to climate change as follows: "Telling Westerners that the time has come, that their world has ended, that they have to change their way of life, can only produce a feeling of total incomprehension, because, for them, the apocalypse has already taken place. They have already gone over to the other side" (p. 206). To explain what he means with this 'over to the other side', Latour refers to the paradoxical structure of modernity's grand

[24] By historicity, I mean the general idea of humans perceiving themselves culturally moving through time. A negation of historicity can in some way be regarded as a negation of grand narratives. Francis Fukuyama's 1989 essay 'End of History?' is a typical example of the negation of historicity. Lyotard (1984) defines this as postmodernism: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives [(i.e.: grand narratives)]. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimisation corresponds; most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal" (p. XXIV). Although Latour and Gare roughly follow this line of thought, I will not engage in discussing whether a narrative approach to the climate change debate would be a typical postmodernist tendency or not (Latour and Gare actually happen to criticize postmodernism, for it would invoke only more fragmentation of discourse).

narrative that is directed towards the transcendence of its time, where he writes about the ideas of both the 'end time' and of 'definitive truth' merging together. Nevertheless, one could object that our current culture has *not* stopped changing through narratives, by pointing at a large narrative of meliorism, resulting in stories about progress, more comfort, increasing welfare and advancing technology. Yet, I would then like to point at the determinate character of that stream of narratives which seems to be solely focused on utility and lacks space for alternative views and conceptions of the good. Following Latour, the combination of the themes 'end time' and 'definitive truth' eventually merged together and resulted in the modern Western people telling "themselves *that they are absolutely certain that they have reached the end of time*, have arrived in another world, and are separated from the old times by an absolute break. (…) They are […] completely modernized [and,] their only movement is to keep on going forward, never backward" (pp. 195-6, italics original). As I will argue in the next section, it seems to be this sentiment of 'only moving forward' that determines the climate debate so dominantly and in which the same plot of Christianity's monophonic epic of the quest for salvation can be recognised. According to Latour, the gradual misunderstanding of the apocalyptic message of 'the end of times' in Christian- and Jewish traditions led to "an entirely new value to time as something that passes: it bears, *and bears alone,* the final achievement, which is never final! What lasts forever, lasts *only through* what does not last" (p. 197, italics original). Since this grand narrative has prevailed ever since, it should not be surprising to witness the strong tendency of Western people to believe in some kind of salvation in the form of a technological fix.

Our current vantage point in argumentation could now plausibly suggest that Taylor's (1995) critique (§1.3) of the modern disentangled, 'empty' and autonomous subject (and its self-understanding, for some people[25]), implies the same notion of immutability as the one that is typical for modernity's grand narrative. With regard to morality, Gare (2002) argues that Thomas Hobbes took Descartes' mechanical and immanent view of the world "to its logical conclusion" and developed it by his social contract theory to a normative foundation, on the basis of the rational and egoistic subject. Rendering societies "mechanical aggregations of egoistic individuals who have

[25] Recall Strawson's insistence on 'the past as such'.

entered into a contract to obey the covenants of society, and who, through their constrained egoism keep the cogs of society running. The only basis for ethics is enlightened egoism" (p. 83).

Yet, although it may be the case that the plot of the grand narrative of modernity is the negation of change and time, people are nonetheless narrative in their being and according to philosopher Paul Ricoeur, "narrative is the fundamental structure of the experience of time" (cited by Gare, 2002, p. 93). Therefore, if we want to start history again, we need to begin telling stories again: stories about ourselves and our condition on this planet. It is for that reason that I will now inquire, through a narrative lens, into the way that climate change in Western society is generally narrated about.

§ 2.4 - The Anthropocene narrative

What seems to have become the central narrative in climate change discourse is that of the 'Anthropocene'. The Russian geologist Alexei Pavlov first used the word in 1922 and 80 years later, the Dutch meteorologist Paul Crutzen proposed it to denote a new geological epoch. The word Anthropocene[26] has been the subject of great debate ever since. Following the Holocene, the Anthropocene would be the geological era in which humanity as a species has prevailed over the forces of nature and is now the determining factor for the earth's climate (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Crutzen, 2002). But, as many authors like Jeremy Baskin (2015) note, the Anthropocene "is first and foremost, a frame, a way of understanding the world. In practice we are debating a worldview, under the guise of debating whether or not to baptize a new geological epoch" (p. 14; Malm & Hornborg, 2014). In his chapter '*The Geological Turn, Narratives of the Anthropocene*', Christophe Bonneuil (2015) endorses this view in his analysis of what he regard to be the four most common narratives about climate change. He writes: "[T]he various Anthropocene narratives we tell are performative; *they preclude or promote some kinds of collective action rather than others*, and so they make a difference to the becoming of the Earth" (p. 30, italics mine). Bonneuil characterizes the most dominant narrative of the Anthropocene in public debate (whether or not

[26] Constituted of the ancient Greek words *anthropos* (meaning human) and *cene* (meaning 'new', the word that is used to denote geological time scales).

implicitly) as follows:

> "Since about 1800, 'we', the human species, have inadvertently altered the Earth system at a geological scale. *Anthropos* did so through three stages that can best be documented through quantitative global environmental data. The key causal forces are population growth, economic growth and expansion of international exchange. But a revolution (to be compared only to the Copernican or Darwinian revolutions) occurred recently: Earth system scientists have made *anthropos* aware, at last, of the danger. And, if only policymakers would act on the basis of sound science, these scientists have the knowledge to lead humanity towards a sustainable future" (p. 18).

Besides this prevailing 'naturalist' version of the narrative (called naturalist because a natural-scientific view dominates it), Bonneuil identifies three other versions: Departing from the ideas of the naturalist narrative sketched above, the 'post-nature' narrative completely obliterates the distinction between nature and culture, between the natural- and social sciences. However, Bonneuil argues that this modernity-criticising narrative is ultimately paradoxical, because "in refashioning nature as a flexible hybrid amenable to further market and technological deconstruction-reconstruction, and in claiming that 'we' understand better the very nature of nature in a way past societies could not see, the post-nature narrative intensifies and accelerates modernity" (p. 26). The third, 'eco-catastrophist' narrative could be regarded a classical appeal to humility, as it "argues for the urgent need to radically change the dominant ways of living, consuming and producing, and rejects the belief in technological fixes that would save the planet within the frame of an unchanged socio-economic system" (p. 27). The fourth, 'eco-Marxist', narrative, typically blames capitalism and its consumerism for the current environmental crisis. Not only would capitalism fail to "reproduce the labour force", but the eco-Marxist narrative also points at "a second contradiction of capitalism: its inability to maintain nature. The Anthropocene is therefore a story of the unsustainable metabolism of the capitalist 'world-system' within the Earth system" (pp. 27-8). These accounts are called narratives because they

each organise the scientific data about climate change in a temporal order with its characters and their motives and goals. So the eco-Marxist is a *narrative* instead of a *theory* here, because it conceptualises the broad notion of capitalism (as such), as a character that causes all the harm to the other character: 'the people'.

In what follows, I will formulate a critique of the mainstream ('naturalist') Anthropocene narrative, because it can be regarded as the most dominant one in public debate. It could be plausibly said that its origin can be traced back to the dominance of natural-scientific discourse in the debate on climate change, because, after all, it is the natural-sciences that discovered human-caused climate change. In his now classic article 'The Geology of Mankind' (2002), Crutzen wrote: "A daunting task lies ahead for *scientists and engineers to guide society* towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene" (italics mine). And although he does hint at the importance of large-scale public action by writing that "[t]his will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales", he quickly turns back to the scientific community, mentioning that it "may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to 'optimize' climate" (p. 23).

Although understandable for a natural-scientific vantage point, in the Anthropocene narrative, the inducer of climate change (i.e.: its protagonist) is simply defined as 'mankind'. When the beginning of the industrial revolution is taken as the starting point of the narrative about anthropogenic climate change, the steam engine is often mentioned as the central artefact that launched humanity in complete dominance over the climate. At the same time, not much is being said about the actual social factors stimulating the industrial revolution and thus the emergence of significant amounts of greenhouse gases being emitted, except for the general claim that 'human nature' must have been the cause for this historical event to occur. According to Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014), such simplified reference is made for reasons of logical necessity, because "[i]f the dynamics were of a more contingent character, the narrative of an entire species – the *anthropos* as such – ascending to biospheric supremacy would be difficult to uphold: 'the geology of mankind' must have its roots in the properties of that being" (p. 63). Malm and Hornborg argue that for years, the social sciences and the humanities have largely

adopted this natural-scientific discourse in which climate change is 'anthropogenic', and not *socio-genic*, the latter being the interpretation they argue for.

From that perspective, it would be of great importance not to overlook the societal circumstances of 19th century Britain. Instead of a compact explanation in terms of 'human nature', Malm and Hornborg (2014) point to the incentives for investing in steam technology of that time, caused by the "opportunities provided by the constellation of a largely depopulated New World, Afro-American slavery, the exploitation of British labour in factories and mines, and the global demand for inexpensive cotton cloth" (p. 64). Thus, instead of 'man as such', it all began with a mere small minority: "a clique of white British men" (p. 64). At this point, one could object that it were still human faculties like the ability to manipulate fire, language, tool-use and so forth that rendered climate change possible eventually. However, in any narrative about 'human'-induced climate change, such conditions are to be seen as *trivially* necessary for the emergence of the industrial revolution, because they lack "correlation with the outcome of interest" (p. 64). Next to this common reference to 'mankind' as the cause of climate change, Malm and Hornborg identify another often heard argument that implicitly, but unjustly, holds the entire human species responsible: population growth as the main factor fanning the increase of greenhouse gas emissions. Although there does indeed exist a correlation between these two, fossil fuel combustion "increased by a factor of 654.8 between 1820 and 2010, while [population growth] 'only' did so by a factor of 6.6, indicating that another, far more powerful engine must have driven the fires" (p. 65). Observing that this correlation is indeed by far not significant enough, one's view becomes directed towards the enormous plurality of technological, demographical, political, socio-cultural and economic factors propelling the combustion of fossil fuels throughout history. The often-heard argument that the population growth of 'mankind' plays a determining role by itself, thus fails to hold (Baskin, 2015).

Since it is typical for the natural sciences to draw a distinction between 'nature' and 'culture', between the sphere of natural causation and the activities of humanity, another problem arises: Climate change is abstracted from nature (i.e.: 'de-naturalised'), but put back in the concept of nature immediately afterwards because, referring to 'human nature', it would rest on innate and unchangeable human traits

(Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Baskin, 2015; Latour, 2015). At this point, with the narrativity thesis and its according narrative action theory in mind, it starts to become clear in what way this Naturalist Anthropocene narrative is indeed, like Bonneuil (2015) wrote, a 'performative': To begin with, the narrative is actually a-temporal in its essence, due to having its origin in the natural sciences (that typically need to render their objects immutable). This results in the narrative emitting a deterministic prospect. To wit, it seems to implicitly suggest that since mankind as such has evoked the current situation, there is also only one reasonable approach to 'solving the problem': a technological intervention. In her critique of the climate change discourse, Eileen Crist (2007) even accuses this "single-minded quest for a global warming techno-fix" (p. 35), of sidestepping the problem of industrial-consumerism's virtual limitlessness. Countering this de-politicised and de-historicised notion of the past- and present situation, Baskin (2015) notes: "We know, too, that the terms 'Nature' and 'Culture' are not universal categories, nor is there only one understanding of how they are connected. A range of alternative 'ontological routes' exist, including those fundamentally incommensurable with the dominant perspective of the contemporary West and modernity, the 'Naturalist' approach, as [Philippe] Descola labels it" (p. 16). Directly linked to this negation of process and change for the sake of the universal, is the implicit negation of agency, which is strengthened by its lack of situating people: By structurally referring to 'man', *'anthropos'*, 'humankind', as the cause of the current environmental crisis, no appropriate historical Setting is provided.[27] Rejecting any pluralist approach and re-elevating 'mankind' within- and above the non-human world, the monophonic instead of a polyphonic narrative of the Anthropocene with its a-temporal structure, fits in modernity's grand narrative's main plot (the quest for salvation).

Yet, as we have seen in §2.2, people need to recognize themselves in historical narratives and their social practices in order to situate their own life-narratives through an intersection with the former. Of course, the notion of the Anthropocene should not be abandoned completely, for it does express the realisation that at least the *realm* of humanity is of determining influence on the earth's climate. But in any

[27] Although I am only concerned with public discourse in Western societies, I acknowledge that such a narrative would be even more unsettling when presented to people in third-world countries.

case, as I hope to have shown above, the way in which is generally being narrated about climate change nowadays seems to risk the public debate to 'short-circuit'. It is for that reason that I have attempted to illustrate the analytical relevance of the narrativity thesis. In combination with its theory of action, it seems to offer the potential to approach the climate change debate from a social-scientific and humanities perspective.

In the next chapter, I will propose a completely distinct approach towards public reason by sketching the outlines of a 'narrative paradigm' and a way of solving the potential problem of a relativism of narratives.

Chapter 3

In this final chapter, I will sketch the outlines of a ‘narrative paradigm’, developed in the 1980s by the communication scholar and philosopher Walter Fisher. I will try to show how this paradigm could provide the means for widening the circle of public (moral) deliberation and –action, through the process of critically assessing existing (grand) narratives and constructing new ones. I will hold that this paradigmatic approach could be especially relevant to experts in the field of the social sciences and the humanities with regard to the climate debate and its environmental ethics accordingly.

§3.1 – *Rational Man* as a subplot of *Homo Narrans*

Building largely on the work of Gadamer, Heidegger and Ricoeur, but first and foremost on MacIntyre, Fisher (1987) developed his narrative paradigm (henceforth: NP) and his account of narrative reasoning, as directly opposed to the ‘rational-world paradigm’ (henceforth: RWP) with its strict-logical reasoning (pp. 94-5). Here the word paradigm denotes “a representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience” (p. 59). Whereas the RWP holds humankind to be essentially rational, resulting in its ‘root metaphor’ of ‘*Rational Man*’, the NP departs from the thesis that mankind is essentially a storyteller, a ‘*Homo Narrans*’. Fisher emphasizes that he does not completely reject the other possible conceptions of humans, such as *Homo Economicus, Homo Politicus* and this *Rational Man*. Rather; he understands those types as secondary ‘figures’ under the master-metaphor of *Homo Narrans*, or as ‘subplots’ under the master metaphor interpreting the ‘plot’ or essence of human experience in a specific way (p. 63). In other words: Whereas Homo Narrans is the unconditional mode of being, all others are secondary, occasional and conditional modes of being.

Stating that the RWP constitutes the foundation of Western thought about reasoning since the Classical age, Fisher (1987) writes how modernity’s naturalism its demands for rationality caused the RWP to crouch up to specialised studies. This strong valuing of impartiality and high demands to rationality in order to secure a

shared epistemological outlook by those studies and their experts, led to the emergence of a gap between the ('rational') experts and the ('irrational') public (p. 61). This gap rendered public argument and public moral argument in particular (of which partiality can be seen as typical), rudderless. There have been many attempts to reconcile the public and the experts, largely known as the philosophical tradition of public reason (e.g.: Habermas). Yet, Fisher presents his narrative paradigm as a better solution to bridging this gap, as it is philosophically grounded in ontology (p. 65).

The main difference between the two paradigms thus resides in the fact that the RWP's demands for inclusion in a process of rational deliberation are much higher than the NP's. Actualisation of the RWP requires specific qualified persons, or 'experts', for public decision-making. "It further demands a citizenry that shares a common language, general adherence to the values of the state, information relevant to the questions that confront the community to be arbitrated by argument, and an understanding of the argumentative issues and the various forms of reasoning and their appropriate assessment" (Fisher, 1984, p. 4). With its philosophical grounds in epistemology, it requires agents that are 'rational' (i.e.: competent in argument) (Fisher, 1987, p. 60). Traditional rationality[28] is something people have to be 'educated into', at the same time rendering narrativity a mere element in rhetoric or an aesthetic faculty. Now, since "the narrative impulse is part of our very being" (Fisher, 1987, p. 65) [29], the NP can be regarded as much more inclusive. So as we can see, the NP shifts the locus of rationality from the modern epistemological construal and its constraints to reason, towards an ontological presupposition of human beings and accordingly one's rhetorical competence as central to narrative rationality.

If we look, once again, at the position of Strawson (2004), we can say that he does not relate to his-self and his experiences in a narrative way, but rather in an a-temporal way. One could now follow Fisher's (1984; 1987) paradigm and see that through this lens, Strawson's self-perception as he claims it to be, is completely merged with the NP's subplot, or character, of *Rational Man.* I admit that this is indeed a very bold claim to make, for it suggests that Strawson is a narrative being after all,

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[28] As we saw in §1.3, with its 'rigorous methodology for the mind' being crucial for any modern epistemological endeavour.
[29] A claim resting on the narrativity-thesis, which I hope to have convincingly defended in the first chapter.

but simply not aware of it. However, let us not forget that he makes a very strong claim himself about people consciously narrating about themselves and the world (roughly: this would amount to the claim that they are genetically predetermined to distort the truth of their perceived reality).

Yet, at this point, wherein the NP *everything* is narrative, how to order them in an acceptable way when it comes down to their value for public deliberation? Put differently: What is a 'good narrative'?

§3.2 - Narrative rationality as an escape from a relativism of narratives

As I have already suggested, the NP has its own logic, which Fisher (1987) calls 'narrative rationality': a framework that holds that it is "not the *individual form* of argument that is ultimately persuasive in discourse" (p. 48, italics original). Rather, it is the values that are ultimately persuasive, and values can be expressed in many modes of communication. Therefore, narrative rationality focuses on 'the logic of good reasons': "elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" (p. 107). Through the lens of narrative rationality, every argument, every line of reasoning, is fundamentally a story being told. In order to assess the validity then, every act of communication is tested against two components: formal *probability* (coherence) and substantive *fidelity* (truthfulness and reliability).

The principle of probability entails three characteristic aspects: *argumentative*- or *structural* coherence; *material* coherence (comparing with stories told in other discourses. E.g.: a story may be consistent internally, but certain details, counter-arguments or issues may be ignored, overlooked or left out); and *characterological* coherence. Closely linked to what is called 'ethos' in Aristotle's rhetoric, this last type of coherence is one of the key aspects of narrative rationality as opposed to traditional logic, because in narratives, the concept of character is pivotal: The behaviour of characters in a story (both as narrators and actors), determines the credibility of the story. Someone's character exists by virtue of the pattern that other people form of him, through interpretation of his decisions and actions that reflect values. The

coherence of character starts to get questioned as soon as the tendencies of this pattern start to contradict each other or change significantly. In other words: The whole idea of coherence, both in real-life as in fiction, requires that characters behave characteristically. The characterological aspect of this requirement of coherence for narrative probability is of such importance because "[d]etermining a character's motives is prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief" (Fisher, 1987, p. 47).[30] Therefore, Fisher explains that "[i]n epistemological terms, the question would be whether or not a narrative satisfied the demands of a coherent theory of truth. The most compelling, persuasive stories, are mythic in form, stories reflective of 'public dreams' that give meaning and significance to life" (pp. 75-6).

The fidelity of a story, as the other component that determines the soundness of an argument in the NP, is assessed by the aforementioned logic of good reasons. Good reasons can be seen as products of not only exclusive clear-cut logical ways of reasoning, but also of all other forms of human communication that offer considerations additional to strictly rational ones. Narrative rationality allows that certain structures of argument in discourse can and should still be addressed and assessed on their own terms: "[N]arrative rationality does not deny the limited but necessary use of technical logic in assessing inferences or implicative forms that occur in human communication" (Fisher, 1987, p. 48). Yet, such specialised and distinct logic would only be meaningful as long as its discourse as such is embedded in a storied, narrative, context. As Fisher cites Alexander Marshack: "Numbering may perhaps be thought of as 'pure' and unrelated to storied meaning, but psychologically it is, nonetheless, a symbolizing and cognitive process. As such, it is always a 'time-factored' and 'time-factoring' sequential skill" (p. 48). In any case, the most important feature of narrative rationality in comparison to rhetorical logic is that it does not favour any form of discourse over another. "No matter how strictly a case is argued, -scientifically, philosophically or legally- it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality" (p. 49). So, to translate this aspect of fidelity into epistemological terms again, narrative fidelity deals with truth according to the doctrine of correspondence:

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[30] Observing the contemporary mainstream narrative of the Anthropocene with its 'mankind', it becomes evident that its characterological coherence is outright sloppy (see §2.4).

“Though the most engaging stories are mythic, the most helpful and uplifting stories are moral” (p. 76).

When applying these tools by looking at moral stories in particular, we can thus by now see how Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* is a ‘bad story’. Although it may have structural coherence, it does not have characterological coherence: it demeans many significant people and denies their identity. Hitler’s narrative also failed to meet standards of fidelity, because it negated humanity-wide shared truths about justice, reason, veracity and so forth. At the same time, for the sake of a clear contrast, the narratives of characters like Jesus or Buddha *do* meet the conditions for a ‘good story’, because they “satisfy both narrative probability and narrative fidelity for those cultures for whom they were intended - and many others across time and place” (Fisher, 1987, p. 76). In §1.3, we saw how Taylor (1995) suggested the need for a different conception of reason that would enable us to “articulate the background of our lives perspicuously” (par. 46), in order to overcome the primacy of the epistemological construal of modernity. The NP with its emphasis on narrative rationality might be such an alternative conception of reason. With regard to climate change, it can now be seen how narrative rationality would offer a systematic approach to assessing the stories in its discourse.

What I hope to have rendered plausible by now, is the suggestion that the mainstream contemporary (environmental) ethical discourse is ultimately rooted in the RWP. And its experts (e.g.: applied ethicists with their expertise accordingly) *have* made their moral case by now, be it at least in rough lines. Yet, as I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, significant public action in terms of change in attitude and lifestyle changes stays out. I now want to propose Fisher’s way of scrutinizing a public moral argument, like the one around climate change, and see what it could possibly yield.

§3.3 - Public moral argument and the narrative paradigm

What is ‘public’ about a public moral argument, is that instead of occurring in communities of experts, it is “made for wide consumption and persuasion of the polity at large; and it has to be aimed at what Aristotle called ‘untrained thinkers’ if it is to be effective” (Fisher, 1987, p. 71). However, given the RWP, the prevalence of experts and

their rational discourse makes it difficult, or even impossible, for such untrained thinkers to judge arguments on their own terms and genuinely participate in deliberation. What happens when experts argue about moral issues in public debate accordingly, is that "the public has no compelling reason to believe one expert over the other" (p. 72). However, this is a conclusion that one has to draw from the perspective of the RWP, because from that perspective, the public is generally to be regarded as irrational. It is as soon as one's vantage point shifts to the NP, that it becomes clear that the lay-public actually *does*, in fact, analyse the experts' stories reasonably, to wit: in the aforementioned terms of narrative coherence and -fidelity. Then, as argued for in the first half of the previous chapter, it is this paradigmatic narrative perspective that can help to render the moral obligations and constraints of climate ethics meaningful and genuinely implementable for people in their day-to-day life. The 'good reasons' that follow from narrative reasoning by the public, should be seen as the result of how the public perceives itself to be situated in narrative-historical terms with regard to the arguments that were brought up in the debate by experts. And of course, in reality, there is nothing like a 'uniform' public as one character like the standard Anthropocene narrative pretends. Rather, the public should be seen as a multiplicity of characters being engaged in a polyphonic dialogue, which emerges from wherever their life-narratives intersect in the process of being lived out.[31] In any case, the pivotal point here, is that many decisive arguments in public moral debates cannot be made visible in the RWP, because many decisive reasons relate to divisions of human's day-to-day deliberation not accounted for in terms of traditional rationality: their life narratives, their lived experience. Fisher then writes, that "[w]hen the *full* range of good reasons for responses is taken into consideration, experts and laypersons meet on the common ground of *their shared, human interests.* And it is fair to judge arguers on those broad terms, for, as Stephen Toulmin observed, 'a scientist off duty is as much an ordinary man as a tinker or a bus-conductor off duty'" (p. 73, italics mine).

Entering the vicinity of the discussion around ethical expertise (Baggini, 2010), one could now observe the emergence of the role of counsellor for the ethicist. The

[31] I admit that from this narrative perspective, an essential question arises about to what extent people's characters should be differentiated. Although I will not engage in answering that question (I would not even be capable of), it seems to me that this will always depend on the context and purpose of the assessment. Determining this could be typically a task for social-scientific inquiry.

expert takes this role, “whenever she or he crosses the boundary of technical knowledge into the territory of life as it ought to be lived. Once this invasion is made, the public, which then includes the expert, has its own criteria for determining whose story is most coherent and reliable as a guide to belief and action” (Fisher, 1987, p. 73). With regard to the debate around climate change, its ethics and people’s (in)action, the NP could thus be seen as a fresh impulse for the social sciences and the humanities. Not only does the NP provide a lens that potentially reveals much more about people’s actual deliberation and (social) practices, it also urges experts that are concerned with climate change and environmental ethicists in particular, to deliberately take on the challenge of bridging this gap between them and the public. Doing this “by telling stories that do not negate the self-conceptions that people hold of themselves” (p. 75), is thus crucial. As Bonneuil (2015) writes: “We need a plurality of narratives from many voices and many places, rather than a single grand narrative from nowhere, from space or from the species” (p. 29). No matter how rationally justified a moral deliberation may ever be, as long as the story it tells denies the self-conception of its audience, it is meaningless and ineffective.

Conclusion

What our daily lives and the world we live in will look like in the future is of course unknown, but that they will change dramatically seems inevitable. Especially in view of the condition of the earth's climate. For the better or for the worse? The answer to that question lies in our hands. Enormously far-reaching changes will have to take place in order to stop the eerie scale and speed of destruction of the best that our planet has to offer in terms of flora and fauna, and even of life itself. Yet, it is never too late for change. I hope to have been able to give a glimpse of what a narrative conceptualisation of humankind can offer with regard to motivating large groups of people to bring about the behavioural change that our morality demands of them into practice. Recalling my research question: "*Can the narrativity thesis enrich the climate debate?*", my answer will be a yes.

In the first part of this work, I have made an attempt to make plausible the idea that every human being is essentially a 'story-telling animal', but that modernity's influence has changed this image. The rational and autonomous subject that followed eventually came to dominate our mainstream ethical theorising.

In the second part, I have tried to argue that it is narration, rather than rational deliberation, that ultimately brings people into action. Subsequently, I suggested that it is the structural negation of the significance and importance of narratives by our modern Western science-ridden culture, which has led to people's sense of historical urgency and agency moving to the background of their lives. When people lose the sense of their capacity to act accordingly, the public debate risks to be short-circuited: only the experts are seen to be able to determine what the future will hold for the people. What remains is a determined perspective on the future in which science will eventually save humanity from the monster it first has created. It is thus, as I have tried to argue, the development and telling of new stories about ourselves and our role in these times, which could provide an antidote to this impasse.

However, soon enough the question arises about *what* stories have to be told. Because if everything is a narrative, what story is 'good' and what story is 'bad'? The narrative paradigm, of which I sketched the outlines in the third and last part of this

thesis, promises with its own logic called 'narrative rationality' to tackle this lurking relativism of narratives. In addition to that, the narrative paradigm promises to significantly enlarge the scope of the public debate. Resting on the narrativity thesis, the paradigm its redefining of humankind as *Homo Narrans* promises to break open the discourse of the experts and involve the public on the basis of humans' primary way of being in the world, in the forming of new narratives.

Of course, this thesis is merely a rough sketch of what could be regarded as a research agenda for social-scientific and anthropological research. For as I have hope to have shown with my thesis, it is the humanities and the social sciences which could be regarded to have stayed behind at the point where climate change and everyday life collide with each other.

The limitations of this thesis are probably the big, yet often unavoidable, claims that had to be made in order to reach its grand point. I am aware of that. Switching the rational lens for a narrative one may grant great insights and understanding, yet at the same time risks tunnel vision and blindness to other pressing arguments and concerns of a more factual and scientific nature. The interdependence between truth and meaning has already been argued for here, but it is still the question where one begins and the other ends, and how the two are interwoven in reasoning and plans of action concerning climate change. To make everything even more complex, narratives are 'fuzzy': In determining of what profundity, characterological specificity and scope, the yet-to-be-told stories will have to be, lies an enormous, maybe even daunting, task. Nonetheless, it is such research that I would like to recommend to scholars in the field of the humanities and social sciences.

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