

Narrative Identity

PHIL 375, UBC

Philosophy and Literature

May 15, 2018

Choose from the following options. This item will not be graded.

iClicker Question

Which of the following features is not one that Galen Strawson investigates as a possible condition for diachronicity?

- A ▶ form-finding
- B ▶ story-telling tendency
- C ▶ journalling
- D ▶ revision

Choose from the following options. This item will not be graded.

iClicker Question

Who is Strawson's example of someone who thinks that the psychological narrativity thesis is true (ordinary human beings experience their lives in some sort of narrative way), but the ethical narrativity thesis is NOT true (the narrative outlook is not essential to a well-lived life)?

- A ▶ Henry James
- B ▶ Jean-Paul Sartre
- C ▶ Marya Schechtman
- D ▶ Charles Taylor

Two Claims

- psychological thesis** this is a descriptive, empirical claim about the nature of ordinary human experience, where a lack of narrativity is pathological with respect to how ordinary that experience is
- ethical thesis** this is a normative, ethical claim that a narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood

Combinations of the Two Claims

| | psychological thesis | ethical thesis |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Sartre/Stoics | yes | no |
| Plutarch | no | yes |
| Schechtman/Taylor/MacIntyre | yes | yes |
| Strawson | no | no |

Relevant Questions

- What are persistence conditions?
- What is the difference between a human being and a subjectively experienced self?
- What is true about these intuitions: the chilling, empty deficiency of the Episodic life versus the macerated, clogged, excessively self-concerned, inauthentically second-order qualities of the Diachronic life?
- Does it make a difference to be explicitly or implicitly narrativizing?

Against Narrativity, page 433

I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a narrative without form. Absolutely none. Nor do I have any great or special interest in my past. Nor do I have a great deal of concern for my future.

More Relevant Questions

- How is it that the from-the-inside quality of a memory can be detached from any sense that one is the subject of the remembered experience (434)?
- Does Strawson give a satisfying answer to what it is to have or be a self? Is there an abolition of selfhood lurking in the background? Who am I, and if so, how many? (Richard David Precht) See also *The Ego Tunnel* by Thomas Metzinger or *The Architecture of the Mind* by Peter Carruthers. What are the metaphysics of selfhood?
- How do you assess Strawson's argument that the ethical narrativity claim is associated with self-importance, religion, and narcissism (436f)?

More Relevant Questions

- Does the making coffee narrative scale up to larger narratives and propagate to higher levels; or is Strawson correct to call the narrativity claim about short-term plans trivial?
- Has Strawson addressed the problem that narrativists have with an invasive scientific anthropology? (See footnote 27.)
- How can a narrative be defined stringently? Note Strawson's emphasis on developmental, temporal unity and coherence.
- What does a personal relationship with an Episodic look like?

I understand that the question of the marriage vows was, this morning, considered interesting by some of you, the “yes” to the marriage, the performative “yes” – “I do”, “I do”. This “yes” has to be repeated differently each time. If it’s simply a record saying “I do” “I do” “I do” there is no fidelity. For this “I do” to be a renewed promise it has to be different each time, the same one and different. In order to follow the “I do” today (before the priest), the “idea” of tomorrow should be the same and different . . .

... They must follow one another and confirm themselves but, at the same time, be different. That's what the counter-signature is. Of course, even if I say to the same person "I do" tomorrow and after tomorrow, the fact that this "I do" is different, to some extent, means at the same time fidelity and betrayal. Indeed, it's a kind of perjury to say "I do" to someone. So that may be the paradox in the twin concepts of acoluthia and anacoluthon. You have to betray in order to be truthful. (Life After Theory, 10f)

Conditions of Narrativity

- diachronicity** I identify myself (the one who is the receiver of my subjective experiences) with the human being that I was in the past and that I will be in the future
- form-finding** I seek for coherence, unity, and pattern in the temporal sequence events in my life
- story-telling** I think of my life in recognizable literary genres
 - revision** I distort facts about my life so that they fit the kind of story that I want to tell about myself (444)

There is a marked shift on page 447 to a negative evaluation of narrativity. There appears to be some inconsistency between the pre-447 Strawson and the post-447 Strawson.