PERSISTENCE AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

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Introduction: Why Personal Identity Matters

There are many philosophical debates that laypeople and non-philosophers find uninteresting or impractical, and understandably so. Consider the following example: the ontological status of numbers. Some mathematicians may take the existence of numbers for granted; others may not. Regardless of individual mathematicians' beliefs about ontology, mathematics will continue as it always has. Problems will be solved and progress will be made whether or not it is an instance of nominalism or the numbers on the page are related to abstract entities. Another example: many scientists, rightly or wrongly, do not care for many debates in the philosophy of science. This may be because the outcomes of these debates will have little to no lasting impact on many persons' lives or on their professions. Science will continue regardless of the philosophical consensus on scientific realism. This is not to say that these debates are unimportant; I do not think they are. But their importance can be found within themselves, not in their utility or application to practical living.

Personal identity is not one of these topics. It is important not only for its own sake, but because of all of the things that seem to rely on it. Our social interactions rest on notions of persons, personhood, the self, and persistence. Serious skepticism about any of these notions would cast doubt and uncertainty on the way we live our lives. The skepticism does not only arise from doing philosophy; everyday people sometimes have doubts about the persistence of the self over time as they ponder their lives. Additionally, some major religious traditions, for example some strands of Buddhism, hold that the self does not exist. The thoughts are already there; the
philosopher does not have to inspire them.

Why should a person be bothered by skepticism about persistence, especially one’s own? For one, without persistence persons cannot extend into time. Our notion of survival relies on persistence. For those who are frightened at the prospect of death in the distant future, this may be troublesome. A lack of persistence suggests that persons are constantly dying or at least not surviving, while their bodies may continue and new persons are able to live in them for some short amount of time. Near constant death is not an easy conclusion to accept from skepticism about persistence.

Like other philosophers now and before me, I take myself to be trying to provide natural explanations to the metaphysical problems that philosophy has generated throughout the ages. The general purpose of this thesis is part of a long tradition to find persons' place in nature, or to show under what conditions our beliefs about persons are justified within some generally naturalistic framework. Because of this, I will be ignoring problems about dualism, both of substance and property varieties. This is not to say that the problems are not worth discussing, but the focus of this thesis is to deal with certain problems that have arisen when philosophers have attempted to make sense of personal identity by appealing to psychology.

This thesis will focus on the theory of personhood found in Marya Schechtman's *The Constitution of Selves*. This view, explained later, is called the narrative self-constitution view. It is a kind of refined psychological theory and because of that most of this thesis is psychological in nature. Schechtman begins her
book by attempting to refute simpler psychological views and concludes by offering her own suggestions for a theory. Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction in the philosophy of personal identity. The key technical terms have been defined and a brief taxonomy of the field and its problems has been provided. The terms and views explained in this first chapter will be referenced and mentioned in subsequent chapters of the thesis. Those familiar with debates within personal identity will find Chapter 1 to be the least informative, as there is little information added that is not already in the current literature. If the reader is inclined to skim the first chapter because of prior knowledge, I would encourage him or her to at least read section 1.3, in which I give a basic explanation of narrative views.

In Chapter 2, I begin with a critical exegesis of Schechtman, and I show how her view can be treated as a paradigmatic example of the narrative view. I then consider, in 2.3, Galen Strawson's critique of Schechtman and narrative views. I argue that Strawson, by and large, has missed the point and that Schechtman's view is unaffected by his criticisms. In 2.4, I explain Schechtman's response to Strawson and the updated version of her position. Schechtman's restatement of the narrative view in more recent works will be treated as the best statement of her theory to date, and my later criticisms will be directed at them. In section 2.5 I explicate a particular part of Schechtman's view, the self-constitution or self-creation thesis. My general argument in Chapter 2 is that Strawon's criticisms have largely missed the point in regards to Schechtman, and that by relying on his assumption that persons do have to be narrative (due to his insistence on the existence of what he calls episodic persons) he
begs the question against Schechtman and, possibly, invokes the paradox of analysis.

Chapter 3 is the first of my two main arguments against the narrative view. I argue against the use of ethical reasons as justification for metaphysical views. Additionally, I argue that ‘person’ is an ontological term, not a necessarily ethical one. This allows my general criticism against the philosophy of personal identity’s methodology to be applicable to constitution and persistence questions. If ‘person’ was an inherently ethical term, then my argument could hold true but fail to apply to the debate at hand. If ‘person’ can be separated from ethics, at least at the beginning of an analysis, then my argument applies and shifts the methodology of personal identity debates into similar territory as other metaphysical questions. While doing this, I argue tangentially for metaphysical realism, though I write that the common conception of realism may be troubled when persons are included in the analysis as they are necessarily mind-dependent objects, while realism has typically been characterized as arguing for the existence of non-mind-dependent objects. I conclude the chapter by discussing the role ethics may play in some metaphysical discussions, but only when one has shifted the debate from revisionary to descriptive metaphysics. I use the compatibilism versus determinism debate to illustrate the point.

Chapter 4 argues that narrative views as described by Schechtman and others are constructive, and that this leads them to a potentially devastating conclusion. The narratives must be constructed from something, and I argue that it is memory. But empirical facts about memory do not allow for it to persist in a quantitative way, but rather in a qualitative way, much like persons. If Schechtman’s criticism of
mainstream psychological views is correct, this reduces the persistence of memory to resemblance relations. And memory is the building blocks of narrative. If this is the case, then narrative is also reduced to resemblance relations. Narrative, therefore, does not persist through time in a non-qualitative way, and one is better off accepting a psychological theory by virtue of parsimony. Most critics of Schechtman have attacked her using the standard philosophical techniques of thought experiments and conceptual analysis. I argue that empirical facts have a large role to play in personal identity debates, especially within a naturalistic framework. The metaphysics of personal identity will be connected to the science of personal identity.\(^1\) This should not be taken as an attempt to replace metaphysics with science; it is my view that the two are congenial on at least some topics. Personal identity is one of these. Schechtman, while certainly doing metaphysics, seems to share this opinion. This is evident from her favorable mentioning and quotation of psychologists who largely pioneered the narrative view as an empirical thesis about humans. Schechtman takes this empirical account and attempts to generalize it from human-specific theory to a theory of persons. I then argue that Schechtman and narrative theorists may save narrative views by adopting what I call a causal narrative view. However, even my charitable reconstruction of narrative views, where narratives are formed from self-consideration but persist through causal relationships, fails to overcome objections. I conclude this thesis with some general observations about personal identity and the philosophy of

\(^1\) Here I believe that the relevant sciences will be psychology, neurobiology, and neuroscience. Obviously this indicates a tendency to prefer, from the outset, psychological accounts of persons.
personal identity, noting why these problems are so difficult to solve.
Chapter 1: Personal Identity

The debates within the philosophy of personal identity can be divided into two main questions at first: What makes a person, and what allows for the persistence of persons? In at least some of the literature, these questions are be called the \textit{constitution question} and the \textit{persistence question} respectively, though different philosophers have used different terms. Many of the major competing theories of personal identity come part and parcel with an answer to both questions. The two questions are obviously linked, but it is far from clear that an answer to one question fully implies an answer to the second.

Another distinction that can be made is one between a metaphysical problem and an epistemological one. This distinction can be applied to both the constitution question and the diachronic question. While the metaphysical questions ask what constitutes a person, the epistemological formulation asks how one \textit{knows} if someone else is a person or not and how one \textit{knows} if some person has persisted through time. This thesis will largely be concerned with the metaphysical problems of personal identity and will only address the epistemological problems when necessary.

1.1 Key Terms

A debate within personal identity will make extensive use of terms that are relatively common in everyday speech, and so one must be very clear about certain terms. For example, sometimes in common parlance it is said "He is acting like a
different person” when someone has been acting strangely. Or there are instances where someone says, “That person’s identity is based on their career.” None of these are what philosophers mean when they talk about persons and personal identity. This isn’t to say that the talks about identity in that particular sense are wrong; it is simply the case that when philosophers talk about personal identity, they mean something more than the general attitudes of a person. After all, Michael Jordan most certainly persisted after he retired from basketball, and he is still Michael Jordan even when he is in such a bad mood that he is, as one might say, not acting like himself. Other persons associate certain actions with certain persons out of a force of habit—as Hume might point out, it cannot be helped due to the human psychological condition. But this association should not be taken to mean that a person is merely a composite of those actions, or simply the dispositions that lead to those actions. What the layperson is thinking of when they say these things is probably best captured by the term personality.

There is also the matter of identity. In the strict philosophical sense, identity is a logical relation that an object can only have to itself. This is a restatement, in altered terms, of Leibniz's Identity of Indiscernibles. If two supposed objects share all of their properties, then in fact there are not two objects, but only one. A classic example of this sense of identity is the case of Hesperus and Phosphorus, found in many philosophical texts. Identity is, then, a unique and peculiar relation. It is impossible for any object to be identical with some other object. If this were the case, then the two objects would in fact be the same object. That is, shortly, the nature of logical identity,
often called identity in the strict philosophical sense.

But there is another perfectly good sense of “identity” that is identity in the strict philosophical sense. Sometimes the distinction is stated in terms of a distinction between numerical identity (sometimes called quantitative identity) and qualitative identity. Logical identity is numerical identity, but not qualitative identity. Consider any given object—perhaps a glass bottle—and its properties. It has the property of being made of glass, and of being bottled shaped, and the property of being some color (let’s assume it is green). There can be another glass bottle with all of those same properties. The two bottles can be said to be qualitatively identical, but not numerically so. One can change some of the properties of our original bottle and it would still remain the same bottle. The bottle has persisted through time despite changes. One can paint it black and it will still be the same bottle, even though now it is not qualitatively identical to the other bottle like it previously was. It can change in shape and size, at least to some degree, and still be said to persist. Thus when we ask about personal identity, we are asking about logical identity.

1. 2 Views and Methodology

The history of the philosophy of personal identity can be identified between three major schools of thought: the psychological view, the bodily view, and the dualist view. The psychological view, broadly, argues that a person is their psychology, and that persistence can be accounted for by psychological continuity, such as that
which obtains between an experience of an event and the subsequent memory of that experience, or an intention to do x and doing x in virtue of having intended it.

The bodily view holds that persons merely are their bodies. Within the bodily view, some argue that maintaining of consciousness is the essential role that the body plays. I say this to show that the bodily view, like the psychological view, is not a single thing, but rather a heterogeneous cluster of related views. The bodily is view defended by the likes of Judith Jarvis Thomson and David DeGrazia.

Dualism is the view that there is an immaterial substance that comprises a person, and that this immaterial substance (sometimes called the soul or the mind, or even spirit) is ontologically different than material substance or substances that comprise the body. According to this view these two distinct substances are only contingently related and therefore, the soul may exist independently of the body. The dualist view is common in folk psychology, and philosophically its most famous defender is René Descartes.

Locke also influenced the general methodology of personal identity. The questions about personal identity seem to motivate us to imagine scenarios where only the relevant features play some sort of causal role. These are typically called thought experiments. Those of us who are empirically minded might be skeptical of this methodology, as a use of our imaginations seems to be counterintuitive to the way in which persons typically gain knowledge via experiment or experience. But the problems of personal identity cannot always be answered simply by empirical
investigation. There is an interpretive problem: when faced with data from empirical sources, one must decide what to make of it. Data about persons must be fed into some sort of decision-making process; in order for the correct process to be determined, the answer of what constitutes a person must be settled. Simple experience will not do the work for us. What will settle the matter? For example, many philosophers have what are called ‘body-swap intuitions.’ The idea, which can also be traced to Locke, is that the consciousness of one person can be transferred in some fashion to another body, and that personal identity would be preserved between bodies. Currently, body-swaps and brain-transplants are physical impossibilities, and yet these thought experiments have become increasingly important in debates about personal identity. Many contemporary people will deny that a straightforward consciousness swap is possible, but a brain-transplant will seem more reasonable. I for one lack the confidence to say that a brain-transplant is impossible, as that kind of claim seems much too strong to make given our general confidence in the progress of science. A successful brain-transplant seems conceivable and by extension possible, even if one is not currently possible. The different accounts of personal identity all have differing intuitions about the results of the body-swap thought experiments.

An example of the thought experiment methodology that is common in the philosophy of personal identity can be found in John Perry's introduction to *Personal*.

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2 To say a bit more: simply put, the progress of science is near-impossible, or extraordinarily difficult to predict. Perhaps brain-transplants are impossible; perhaps they are not. Currently, we simply do not know what is the case.
Identity (1975). Perry proposes a thought experiment that relies on our body-swap intuitions. He asks us to imagine a politician and a lobbyist who, the day before an important election, undergo a brain-transplant. The politician wakes up from the operation and is surprised to find that his body is completely different. He is a different height and weight, and his other features are all different than before the swap took place. And yet it seems that it is still him. The “I” seems to have persisted and transferred from one body to the next. According to Perry, we seem to have a strong sense that the politician now resides in the lobbyist’s body.

Someone who believes in the bodily view would say that there was no body-swap. The body of the politician is still the politician, and the body of the lobbyist is still the lobbyist. To the bodily theorist, the very idea of a body-swap, whether it is brain-based or consciousness-based, is ridiculous. If the body remains, then personal identity persists, but it does not transfer between bodies because it cannot. A defender of the dualist view would say that a body-swap is possible, but that a brain-transplant does not necessarily entail that the body-swap occurred. All that matters to the dualist is the immaterial substance—the soul or the mind—that is not necessarily linked to any particular part of the body, or the body as a whole. A mind or a soul can persist even if the body was completely destroyed, and so simply moving bits of a body to another body would not entail that identity was also transferred. Dualism, still defended by some, will not be addressed in this thesis. The psychological view grants that brain-transplants can occur, and that consciousness-swaps are possible. Perry’s thought experiment is perfectly acceptable. Personal identity is tied to the
psychological disposition of a person, not any particular physical part. It is a matter of contingency that the brain is the part of the body that seems to house consciousness, and so it may be necessary for a brain-transplant to be performed in order for it to be a successful body-swap, but that is a fact that is true about this world, not necessarily about all possible worlds in which there are persons.

1.3 Narrative

A fourth view of personal identity that was not as prevalent in historical debates but has gained prominence in the last twenty years is the narrative view. Marya Schechtman, a contemporary defender of this view and author of *The Constitution of Selves* (1996), claims that the narrative view can be found in such thinkers as Alasdair McIntyre, Donald Spence, Jerome Bruner, Roy Schafer, David Polonoff, and Mark Freeman. In Schechtman's formulation of this view, the narrative view is coupled with a thesis about self-creation. Persons, according to Schechtman, bring themselves into existence. Schechtman credits this view to Daniel Dennett, Jean-Paul Sartre, Harry Frankfurt, Jonathan Glover, and Martin Heidegger. By this account persons are not something which emerges from the relations between person-stages at various times.

The narrative view that I will criticize, that of Schectman, can be characterized by a five key theses. One, persons are self-constituting. By this, it is meant that persons do not emerge after certain relations between some particular primitives have
been established, such as an experience and subsequent memory. Instead, they are created by the act of self-consideration, for example, reflecting on the experience and subsequent memory and recognizing them as about the person who is self-considering.

Two, persons are social. Interactions with others persons play a large role in a persons’ self-consideration. This impact is deep and metaphysically significant.

Three, persistence of persons is guaranteed by self-narratives. The act of telling a story about oneself allows for the various experiences throughout time to be attributed to a single experiencing being.

Four, persons fulfill functions. This is particularly relevant to the account given by Marya Schechtman. In her book, she identifies what she calls the four features that persons must possess. Any account of personal identity is supposed to make persons capable of possessing these features.

Five, persons are non-reductive, in the sense that they cannot be characterized as the mereological sum or product of person-stages. ‘Person’ is a primitive kind of object; talk of person-stages is incoherent on the narrative view.

3 Schechtman calls these features, while I choose to call them functions. I call them functions because calling them features implies, by my lights, that they are properties of persons. But the four features seem closer to things that people do, and so function is the proper term.
Chapter 2: Narrative Views

There are a variety of options available when one begins discussing narrative and persons. Daniel Hutto writes that there are a variety of questions regarding narrative that might interest philosophers:

We might wonder: what, if anything, are the identifying features of narratives? What is the basis of our unique narrative capacities? Which cognitive and imaginative capacities enable us to produce and appreciate [narratives]? What roles or functions might narratives play in our lives? (Hutto 2007; 1)

Hutto and I are essentially in agreement about the taxonomy of narrative views, though Hutto identifies several questions that I believe can be reduced into more general categories. There are three distinct theses held by various narrative theorists. They are that narrative guides human action, that narrative enables persons to make sense of the world, particularly other persons’ actions, and that narrative constitutes personal identity. Hutto writes that, of the various theses, the third is by far the most radical and the one most open to immediate critique. On that part, I am in agreement in Hutto's initial assessment of the narrative view.

The narrative identity view is relatively new by philosophy’s standards, and some may view it as distinct from traditional views of personal identity. The features that separate this family of positions from the three traditional views is the highly specific criteria that a thing must meet in order to qualify as a person. The dualist

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4 Of course, this is not meant to imply that the other views do not have specific criteria for personhood. What is intended is that the narrative views criteria are specific and distinct from any
simply has the non-physical mind or soul; the bodily theorist has the body, though this may be an oversimplification of the matter as some bodily theorists place specific requirements on the body; the psychological theorist has psychological continuity. To contrast, the narrative view holds that self-told narrative is the defining feature between persons and non-persons. Personhood is an act of self-creation. As David Shoemaker notes, the narrative view can be seen as a refined version of the psychological view:

Narrative identity is thus really about a kind of psychological unity, but not just an artless or random unity. Imagine, for instance, a subject of experiences to whom various experiences merely happened over time. The events would be unified in a purely passive respect, simply as the experiences contained within the life of that subject of experiences. But for that subject to be a person, a genuine moral agent, those experiences must be actively unified, must be gathered together into the life of one narrative ego by virtue of a story the subject tells that weaves them together, giving them a kind of coherence and intelligibility they wouldn't otherwise have had. (Shoemaker section 2.3)

Shoemaker, we will see in this chapter, provides a fair characterization of narrative views. We will also see that many narrative theorists see their views as an alternative to the psychological view. As such, their arguments are usually two-fold. First, they attempt to show the inadequacy of psychological view for either the constitution or persistence of persons. Second, they attempt to show that narrative can account for both, usually through an argument about the unique features of narrative that allow it to persist and guarantee that multiple experiences in multiple times can be attributed to the same single experiencing being. Simply put, the narrative view can be

of the three traditional views.
characterized as an anti-reductionist view where narrative is seen as both the account of constitution and persistence of persons.

2.1 Narrative and the role it plays

As Hutto mentions above, the central motivation of narrative theorists is to ask what role or roles narrative plays in persons' lives. The answers range from the trivially true to the radical. Hutto gives us three distinct theses within the family of narrative views, though distinctions could be made within the theses to allow for a possibly innumerable amount of specific narrative views. The singular term 'narrative view,' used throughout the thesis, may be a misnomer. There is no one unified narrative view. There are a variety of narrative views, where the only aspect shared by all is an emphasis on the importance of narrative in persons' lives. This is illustrated by Hutto's identification of three distinct questions. Additionally, a survey of the literature shows distinctly different theories of what role narrative plays in persons' lives.

To begin talking about narrative's role, first we must talk about narrative. A provisional definition of narrative is required, and so we can say something like: A narrative is the assignment of causal relations to multiple events, where earlier events are seen as influencing later events and in some sense explaining them. By ‘explanation,’ it is meant that without the earlier event or events, the later event or events could not have occurred. When looking for reasons as to why a particular event
occurred, the narrative provides the explanation, which would be something along the lines of “Event Z occurred because of Event Y, which occurred because of Event X.” So a child steals a candy bar from the general store not just because he is hungry, but because he also has some psychological disposition to steal, which could be a product of environment or biology. There are other forms of narrative as well; the causal relations can be strengthened or weakened based on preference of the storyteller, and the role that subjects and objects play in the narrative may vary. However, multiple events that are somehow related should be present in order for a narrative to be given.

2.2 Schechtman on Narrative Identity

In The Constitution of Selves, Marya Schechtman defends a narrative view of the self, and it is perfectly consistent with Shoemaker’s earlier remarks. She writes,

The cornerstone of the narrative self-constitution view is the claim that a person’s identity is created by a conception that is narrative in form. Most broadly put, this means that constituting an identity requires that an individual conceive of his life as having the form and the logic of a story—more specifically, the story of person’s life—where “story” is understood as a conventional, linear narrative. (Schechtman 1996; 96)

Schechtman, here, proposes several conditions that must be satisfied in order for there to be a person. One, a person’s identity must be narrative in form. Two, this narrative must have what she calls the ‘form and logic of a story.’ Three, this story must specifically be about a person’s life and, namely, the person who is telling the story. Four, this narrative must be conventional and linear. Clarification of some of these
criteria can come by way of example: an identity-constituting narrative should resemble a book like *The Great Gatsby* rather than a film like *Pulp Fiction.* In *Gatsby,* causes precede effect, and reference to the past is used to explain events. In *Pulp Fiction,* the audience sees characters die and then appear again a few scenes later. A discerning viewer can rearrange the events of the film into a coherent, linear narrative, but if the story is taken at face value with no additional thought or interpretation, it is incoherent. This is what I take Schechtman to mean by a 'conventional and linear narrative.'

Other narrative theorists hold similar criteria for personhood and identity-constitution, and by doing so emphasize the role that narrative plays in both personal and social interactions, such as when MacIntyre says that in order to understand the actions of others, “we always move towards placing a particular episode in the context of a set of narrative histories, histories of both the individuals concerned and of the settings in which they act and suffer” (MacIntyre 1989; 97). Notice, though, that MacIntyre’s emphasis on the role of narrative in social interactions does not immediately lend support to the idea that persons are narrative in form (to use Schechtman’s terminology), or that narrative is the central identity-constituting feature. There is a bit of leap to say that simply because persons use narrative to understand action that persons then are necessarily narrative creatures. And while perhaps MacIntyre is undertaking a descriptive project rather than a normative one like

5Schechtman in fact cites MacIntyre as a supporting thinker.
Schechtman, the moral of the story remains: the necessity of narrative to persons is a radical claim, and merely pointing to social practice will not provide sufficient reason to accept the conclusions.

Why is narrative important, then? First, it is important to recognize Schechtman’s goal. She is attempting to state our folk intuitions about persons and then create a systemic account of personhood that preserves all or most of these intuitions in a clear, coherent way. She undertakes a project that is partly descriptive and partly normative. She begins by identifying common beliefs, believing them to be intuitively justified, and proceeds to move on to offer a theory that she claims best explains them. The narrative view, she claims, most adequately does this. According to Schechtman, it is due to the way that narrative allows us to make sense of what she calls the four features: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation. These characteristics are what Schechtman believes persons, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, value and care about when it comes to personal identity. The utility of mentioning what others value when discussing ontological questions is discussed in Section 3.1.

Schechtman appears to be answering the question of what a person is by giving a functional account of what a person does. This is similar to work done in the philosophy of mind, such as Peter Godfrey-Smith's: “We are discussing a possible view about the ‘place of mind in nature,’ where finding mind’s ‘place’ is, again, not understood as finding where it exists in the physical world, but finding its characteristic role in nature” (Godfrey-Smith 1996; 14). A charitable way to read
Schechtman is to say that she is following a similar line of thought in her work, where she takes as an assumption that persons do certain things, and that one can begin inquiry based on these actions. Persons survive over time, arguably in a manner different than simple persistence questions; persons are moral agents, and so they have moral responsibilities; persons are self-interested in a special, unique sort of way; and persons are entitled to certain things in the future—compensation—based on what they have done in the past. Once one knows what persons do, one can look for what characteristics are necessary for these actions to be justified.

Schechtman writes that "unlike the psychological continuity theory, the narrative self-constitution view can explain our intuitions about the relation between personal identity and survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation" (Schechtman 1996; 93). But how? Schechtman makes a distinction between reidentification and characterization. 6 When the focus is on reidentification, the psychological continuity theorist is forced to say that stages of a consciousness at different times are actually the same consciousness. It should be noted that this is not what psychological theorists say, but rather what Schechtman believes they are forced to accept this conclusion in order to save their larger project. About these theories, she is quite clear that she believes that,

They do not allow for the persistence of a single, experiencing subject, and such persistence is necessary to make sense of the attitudes and practices surrounding these features. Survival involves the continuation of the same

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6 According to Schechtman, reidentification questions concern the logical relation of identity. Characterization questions ask what psychological factors constitute a person.
experiencing subject; moral responsibility requires that the experiencing subject who commits a crime to be the one to experience the punishment; self-interested concern requires that the person having an experience in the future be the one who anticipates it, and compensation demands that the same experiencing subject who suffers a sacrifice enjoy the later benefits. (Schechtman, 1996; 149)

The switch to characterization questions, which the narrative view requires, allows us to think of consciousness “in a whole new way...by pointing us toward issues of attribution” (Schechtman, 1996; 136). By attribution, Schechtman means the attribution of certain actions to a single consciousness. This consciousness changes, though, and so there must be something else involved. Here Schechtman says that actions can only be attributed to a single experiencing being “if they are all attributed to a single identity-constituting narrative” (ibid).

This identity-constituting narrative is part of the kind of account that Schechtman believes can make sense of the four features by providing a single experiencing subject over different points in time. Initially though, one should be skeptical: What is it exactly that allows narrative to be considered a single, temporally extended experience subject to which actions can be attributed if consciousness cannot? The question can be clarified: What meaningful distinction is there between narrative and consciousness? What does narrative have that consciousness lacks?

Here, Schechtman is unclear. Identity is constituted by narrative, it seems, because of what narrative is. But, as is discussed further below, this is vague and misleading. Narrative can be a great many things. From Schechtman’s earlier
comments, a view can be constructed that requires that an identity narrative resemble the form of a story. If one is recalling my provisional definition of what narrative is, this indicates that an identity narrative must feature a connection between the events of the past and the events of the present, with the expectation that the future will have this same relationship to the current present when it is past. Schechtman’s later comments about the narrative view vindicate this interpretation of her thesis.

But there is still a further clarity issue—is a person a narrative, or is a person one who is capable of constructing a narrative? These are two distinct issues, and here one can find quotations in Schechtman that point to both possibilities. I provide a charitable reading of Schechtman on the creation of persons in section 2.5.

2.3 Strawson on Narrativity

It is here that Galen Strawson’s criticisms become relevant. Strawson’s “Against Narrativity” (2004) provides an argument against the narrative view and against Schechtman’s formulation more specifically. Strawson identifies two different aspects of the narrative view, which is how he makes his moral argument after his basic syllogistic argument. The syllogistic argument attempts to show that the narrative view is false by virtue of facts about the world. This takes on the descriptive narrative view, which holds that all persons are narrative in nature. This he challenges as simply false. There are narrative persons, yes, but there are also what he calls episodic persons. He identifies himself as one these. One is an episodic person, Strawson holds,
One does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future...One has little or no sense that the self that one is was there in the (further) past and will be there in the future, although one is perfectly well aware that one has long-term continuity considered as a whole human being. Episodic are likely to have no particular tendency to see their life in Narrative terms. (Strawson 2004; 430)

Episodic persons are contrasted with what he calls a diachronic person. One is a diachronic person if “one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future” (ibid 430). Additionally, diachronic experience is something that has at least a relatively long-term temporal continuity. This continuity can be for an entire lifetime, or for some shorter (but still extended) period of time. According to him, diachronic persons can be narrative or non-narrative (they can think of themselves in narrative or non-narrative terms), but episodic persons cannot be narrative. Diachronicity is a necessary feature for narrativity. I believe that Strawson is correct in this particular regard, as we can propose a simple conceivability argument that features a diachronic person who lacks narrative. This person or being perhaps persists throughout time and fulfills all of the features of personhood that Schechtman requires. However, this person’s self-conception is not narrative in form. This person sees himself as intimately connected to his past selves, but perhaps his self-conception is not a traditional, linear form. This intimate connection is the simple reflection, over time, that the first-person indexical he is employing now referred to this same self at different points. A primitive, basic recognition of sameness over time without narrative seems possible, and so I am
uncomfortable immediately saying that all diachronic persons are narrative in form.

Putting aside my objections for the time being, Strawson’s criticism can be analyzed on its own merits. The core of Strawson’s argument against the narrative view can be formalized as such:

(1) If the narrative view is correct, episodic persons do not exist.

(2) Episodic persons do exist.

(3) The narrative view is incorrect.

This is Strawson's metaphysical argument about the nature of persons. It is a simple *modus tollens* argument, one any logic student should recognize. The crucial premise is obviously (2), which flat-out denies the central claim of any Schechtman-style narrative view.\(^7\) In addition to his metaphysical argument, Strawson has a moral argument about practice from a given metaphysical theory, which can be formulated as such:

(4) The adoption of the narrative view excludes some persons and treats them as not persons.

(5) Treating a person as something that is not a person is wrong.

(6) The narrative view advocates wrong actions.

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\(^7\) Strawson claims to be an Episodic person, and therefore (2) is justified. However, this raises further questions. Are persons’ self-considerations veridical? I do not think so. If persons’ self-considerations were veridical, then the arguments would be easily settled. The fact that there has been such heated debate over the nature of persons, when coupled with the premise that philosophers consider themselves persons, surely indicates that there have been contradictory self-considerations, and therefore that a self-consideration should not be seen as justification for belief in a premise, especially one as crucial to an argument as (2).
(7) No true theory leads to immoral consequences.

(8) The narrative view is false.

Strawson's moral argument does not seem to be logically valid, though it is intuitively valid. However, Strawson sees the moral aspect as an important feature of narrative views. He characterizes them as exclusionary and immoral. (7) is my best way to explain this, though the premise is never explicitly stated in his work. But it is a reasonable assumption, and one that I am willing to grant him at least for the moment. A further discussion of his moral argument and moral arguments in general is made in section 3.1.

Strawson attempts to give an account of persons that are free from narrative altogether, and adds a moral element to his overall argument. He claims that narrative is not, as Schechtman describes, what constitutes a person. More extremely, he believes we can paint a picture of personhood that finds narrative unnecessary in certain cases. These are his ‘episodic persons,’ and they are, according to Strawson, a completely normal variant on human persons. There are ‘narrative persons,’ and these are the persons that Schechtman describes in her work, but these are not the only kinds of persons.

As soon as one introduces kinds of persons, one must ask what it is that makes all of these kinds fall under the umbrella of persons. There must be some unifying themes or a set of criteria that allow us to distinguish between persons and non-persons. And so we look for what the defining features of all persons are in order to
give a proper account of the necessary and sufficient features of persons. If a unitary account is impossible, then we can begin to explore bifurcation. Of course, parsimony is a rule of thumb and should not be treated as a refutation in the absence of further evidence or counter-arguments.

Strawson is attempting to disprove a family of views in his piece, not simply Schechtman’s. And in fact, he is attempting to not only make room for his philosophical position, but also to change a social practice. Namely, this is the psychological practice of treating subjects as if they are the narratives they hold, or as if they ought to hold narratives about themselves. By doing so, an episodic person becomes deficient in virtue of not being regarded as a person and in need of more psychological help than a narrative person from the very beginning. This is perhaps the most ambitious part of his project, and it is here I have the most misgivings. Put simply, I believe that the psychological notion of narrativity is much less radical than the philosophical notion, and that it can perhaps have positive results in psychological practices. Whether it actually does have positive results is not for me to say, though, and I can simply to defer to the expertise of psychologists no the matter. Now, it does seem possible that there are perfectly healthy people who have a weakened self-narrative compared to a narrative person. If this is the case, then psychologists need to identify these dispositions and treat them accordingly. But this is no more significant

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8 The 'ought' here could be interpreted as either a moral ought (it is morally better to hold a self-narrative) or as an ought about reasons (if one wants to live a full life, one has good reason to hold a self-narrative).
significant than the distinction between an introvert and extrovert.

Perhaps Strawson is begging the question? Premise (2) would seem to suggest this. After all, if the narrative view is correct then there are no narrative persons. Does Strawson simply deny the consequent and counts it as a refutation? I think not. It is apparent the real core of Strawson’s argument is whether or not there are persons who are entirely free of narrative. After this has been identified, it seems that the dispute can be resolved empirically. One cannot be counted as begging the question by pointing to an empirical fact. Strawson claims to simply identify non-narrative persons. If this is the case, then there is a clear answer. The existence of episodic or non-narrative persons refutes the narrative view. So while current defenders of the narrative view may want to see Strawson as begging the question (because they believe that non-narrative persons do not exist), but this is because they have already adopted an explanatory schema concerning persons. From the point of view differing conceptual schemes, one philosopher's *modus ponens* may be another's *modus tollens*.

But the answer is not so simple. Strawson is wrong to claim that by looking at literature one can easily see that non-narrative persons do in fact exist. Narrative is a vague notion that has been overused by many philosophers and scientists, to the point that one has to be exacting in one’s reading in order to discern what each particular writer means when talking about narrative and narrativity. In here rebuttal to Strawson,

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9 See Strawson (2007). There would be an interesting irony if Strawson was able to disprove narrative theories by appealing to narratives.
Schechtman identifies varieties of personhood narrative. I explain these varieties below.

First though, we can ask an important question: has Strawson defeated Schechtman's position? If we take Schechtman to be asking an important question about constitution of persons, and thus making an ontological claim, then perhaps not. I read Strawson as largely missing the point of Schechtman's thesis. For one, the normative claim that one ought to think of oneself as or within a narrative is not explicit in Schechtman, and I believe that a charitable reading will not include it. Schechtman does claim that in order to be morally responsible or laudable for one's life, one must think of oneself as or within a narrative. But to get to Strawson's normative challenge, another premise must be added. Namely, that it is itself good for one to be able to a moral agent. But the good-making properties of moral agents in and of themselves are not a part of Schechtman's work.

2.4 Schechtman on Strawson

Primarily written in response to Strawson's criticisms, Schechtman wrote a clarification of her views in “Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival,” found in Narrative and Understanding Persons (2007). Schechtman holds that, on key issues concerning narrative, she and Strawson are actually in little disagreement. However, she claims that some of Strawson's key claims draw attention to important parts of her theory which need clarification.
First, there is the problem of narrative and narrativity. Strawson's criticism of narrative theorists relied on his notion of narrativity, which was an all-or-nothing type of thing. One is either in a narrative or not within a narrative. On the other hand, Schechtman prefers to see narrative as a spectrum. From this spectrum she identifies three varieties of narrative that a philosopher might talk about:

At one end of the spectrum, a life-narrative can be conceived as nothing more than a sequential listing of the events in one’s history... Toward the middle of the spectrum are conceptions of a life-narrative that involve not just a sequential listing of life events but also an account of the explanatory relations among them...At the far end of the spectrum is the idea of a life-narrative as an account of a life that approximates as much as possible a story created by a gifted author and edited by a gifted editor. On this understanding there should be a unifying theme and direction to a life-narrative, and extraneous material should be left out. (Schechtman, 2007; 159-60)

While I only made one distinction between the narrative of causality and some sort of life-narrative, Schechtman identifies at least three different kinds of narratives: sequences of events, causal sequences of events, and causal sequences of events that only focus on the salient features of a life. It is this third can that is said to be a true, identity-constituting narrative as she discussed in the *The Constitution of Selves*. But after her revisiting the narrative view in light of Strawson’s comments, she now has what she calls a middle-ground view.

This middle-ground view is the coupling of the middle-ground stance of narrative with a moderate opinion concerning what it means to have a narrative: At one end...is the rather weak requirement that a person’s narrative must somehow operate to impact his current experience...In the middle range, having a narrative would require that a person be able, at least sometimes, to become conscious of her narrative and make it explicit. At the extreme end...would be the view that in order to have a narrative in the relevant sense
So Schechtman so far can be said to hold that a person must recognize his life as a sequence of events with causal connections and that, at least sometimes, should be aware of this fact. To be a narrative person then is to not only live within a narrative, but to recognize that this is the way one is living. An identity-constituting narrative contains a certain degree of self-awareness, though this self-awareness need not be that the narrative is identity-constituting. It need only be the awareness of a self-narrative. One has the internal recognition, from time to time, that this narrative is about oneself and no other, or at least the narrative is centrally about oneself. In addition to this recognition, there is the range of implications of self-narrative. At base, it allows persons to function. In the middle, there is the claim that narrative allows persons to engage in person-specific activities (the four features Schechtman enunciated earlier). The extreme claim is that narrative is essential to leading a good or meaningful life. If one adopts the extreme claim, then one has added further premises, namely moral ones that contribute to the good life. Schechtman rightfully rejects the extreme view, and so remains silent on the issue of narrative as a means of fulfillment. Even if one accepts Schechtman’s spectrum, one can still see cause for concern. Schechtman is right to reject the extreme claim about narrative. The deeper meaning the extreme claim requires is simply asking too much. Meaning is determined by the person spinning the narrative. This meaning is imbued on events by the person involved.
Schechtman’s view, though, is the middle-ground. Something (some object, some organism, some being, etc.) is a person if and only if he has a narrative that is more than just a sequence of events and that takes note of the causal relation between these events, he is able in some sense be aware of this narrative and is able to articulate the narrative when needed, and this narrative allows him to perform person-specific activities. A short note should be made on my use of the biconditional. Some may claim that is inappropriate, but I believe that the proper formulation of Schechtman’s theory, in the distilled form I have presented here, must include the biconditional instead of the conditional or the turnstile. The biconditional does not imply causality, but rather that, in order for something to be true, both of sides must be true. If we were to phrase Schechtman’s theory only using the conditional, then it would be true whenever there is a particular kind of narrative and a person and whenever there is not a particular kind of narrative, by virtue of material implication. By using the biconditional, I am able to show that Schechtman views a particular kind of narrative (a personhood narrative) as materially or logically equivalent to a person. While Schechtman sees her view as commonsensical, I believe that the use of the biconditional actually shows the radical nature of the claim.

The first part of Schechtman’s revised view is that the narrative must be

10 The question of whether 'person' and 'being that holds a self-narrative' is being presented as logically or materially equivalent is an interesting one. By Mendelsohn’s (1979) definition of logical equivalence, two statements are logically equivalent if they have the same truth value in every model. By that characterization, Schechtman could be said to defending a logical equivalence. However, some may have doubts. If so, simply assume that Schechtman is presenting a theory of material equivalence. It is an interesting question by itself, but not one central to this thesis.
composed of sequential events and their causal relations. A less robust version of
narrative—one that is composed purely of a sequence of events—is dismissed
immediately by Schechtman (and here she sees herself as in agreement with Strawson)
as trivially applicable and thus not important in a personhood debate. The causal
relations added to the moderate kind of narrative are, apparently enough to distinguish
between a legitimate person’s identity-constituting narrative and simply a narrative.
The recognition of causal relations is surely a good thing, and it is an impressive
feature of human persons that we are able to recognize not just simple causal relations,
but complex ones as well. But what this has to do with the constitution of identity is
unclear. Humans that we consider full persons are able to appropriately assign cause
and effect to events\textsuperscript{11}, but so are some children who have perhaps not developed a
theory of mind yet. Animals are able to assign cause and effect, but not all animals
who are able to do so are persons. We must ask if these other creatures are also
narrative in form: If so, what is it about narratives in persons that distinguish them?\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Full persons’ may make some uncomfortable at first for a few reasons. One, the political
connotations may bring to mind memories of genocide and oppression (such as slaves being treated
as three-fifths of a legal person under early United States law). Two, one may worry that if there are
full persons and non-persons or not-full persons, that moral responsibility is troubled. I do not think
this is the sense I am invoking. A non-full person would be one who is unable to fully consider
himself as a self in all the ways that are expected of persons. Because of this, one would hold him
not morally responsible for some actions, but responsible for others. An Alzheimer patient may be
held morally responsible for hitting his nurse, but not held morally responsible for starving his cat
because he forget to feed it.

\textsuperscript{12}One may think that a defining feature of persons is their use of language. Animals do not have the
capacity for language as humans do, and this explains their inability to hold self-narratives and thus, by
the narrative view, fail to be persons. But this is only plausible if one thinks of the narratives as
necessarily linguistic, which I do not think they are. Narratives are the assignment of causal correlations
to mental representations of events. If these representations are not linguistic in nature, then the
Earlier in this chapter, I addressed the second part of Schechtman’s revised view, namely that narrative allows persons to engage in person-specific activities, and that without narrative they could not do so. Thus, narrative is necessary for personhood, or persons are necessarily narrative creatures. However, a narrative or a capacity for producing a self-narrative does not seem to me to be the necessary and sufficient condition for personhood. While Schechtman fashions herself as proposing a moderate view of persons and their relation to narrative, I say that making narrative necessary is too restrictive. The mere possibility of persons who are able to engage willingly and not only by mere happenstance in person-specific activities without narrative is enough to discard the view that narrative is an essential property. Schechtman’s articulation constraint, which states that persons must be able to at least at some times articulate at least a partial narrative about themselves, is also troublesome. This articulation constraint does seem like an attempt to restrict personhood to those who we already think of as persons, but it does not do so effectively.

2.5 Constitution and Self-construction

An important part of many narrative theories of personhood is the idea that selves are self-creating. This is immediately suspect: what does it mean to self-create? The initial circularity of such a thesis is good reason to be skeptical. What is being created? Allegedly it is the self. But what is creating this self? We are told by these narratives will not be either.
philosophers that it is the self. Personhood, according to Schechtman, is a creative or constructive enterprise. Schechtman also makes a historical note, arguing that Locke also implicitly argued for the self-creation of persons. This is interesting because, as I note in the subsequent chapter, following Locke’s line of thought allows us to begin our analysis of persons without adding the normative premises that narrative views do. While the narrative view relies on normative premises for its justification, the self-creation thesis does not. This indicates an important distinction: one need not be a narrative theorist if one is a self-creation theorist, though one may need to be a self-creation theorist if one is a narrative theorist.

Self-creation theories may be found in degrees, but I believe that it is acceptable to group them into two categories, weak and strong. Weak self-creation theories hold no ontological significance; strong self-creation theories, however, do. David DeGrazia (2005) holds a weak self-creation view, while Schechtman holds a strong self-creation view. Across the spectrum of self-creation theories, there may be borderline cases where one is not sure if it is weak or strong, making it at first questionable to demarcate theories in such a way. However, each of these theories will be able to eventually be placed within the weak or strong; in principle there is no reason why they cannot be. Strong theories are ontologically significant; weak theories are not.

By *ontologically significant* I mean something very specific. A theory can be said to be ontologically significant if it would alter the number of objects in our ontology or change the relevant properties of some particular objects in our ontology,
provided of course that the theory is true. For example, the theory of resemblance nominalism is a metaphysically significant theory, precisely because, if it is true, then there are fewer objects in our ontology than if some version of a theory of universals is true. Ontological disputes are settled by choosing one ontologically significant theory over another. For example, DeGrazia's question is whether self-creation is possible based on social, economic, and political conditions for certain persons. But this is not a metaphysically significant theory because, while it does attempt to describe the world, it does not alter the ontological status of persons if it is true.

One can contrast Schechtman's ontologically significant theory with Kerby (1991) or Dennett (1984), both of whom hold that the self does not exist, but instead is a phenomenon of narratives. Narratives need something to be centered on; the self is the 'center of gravity,' but if we were to go looking for it, there would be nothing to find. The self here cannot be seen as fulfilling a function; it is a supposed something that explains a set of phenomena. So, this view is ontologically significant since it has an effect on the number of objects in our ontology. Specifically, it reduces the number of objects by however many selves were featured in our folk, pre-philosophical ontology.

The charitable way to read Schechtman, once again being treated as the paradigmatic narrative theorist, is that the act of reflection, the 'considering one as

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13 A clarifying note: Kerby and Dennett cannot be read as self-creation theorists, as they hold that there is nothing being created. They can still be read as narrative theorists and their theories are still ontologically significant, as they alter the number of objects in the ontology.
oneself of a person's life, is what creates persons. It is what separates persons from merely thinking things. The act of thinking makes one a thinker. As some organism reflects on its life and by doing so creates a narrative, its self-identity is established. As this power of reflection continues into the future, with the new events being established as part of the self-narrative, that organism's self-identity persists through time. The relevance of Schechtman's self-creation thesis will be illustrated in the final chapter, where it is assumed that the exegetical concerns have been taken care of.
Chapter 3: Ethics, Narrative, and Ontology

In this chapter, I begin to provide my own critical comments on Schechtman and the narrative view. By making my comments general rather than overly specific and exegetical, I believe that they will pose serious problems to any narrative view that resembles Schechtman in a significant way. I begin, however, with an argument against a common methodology in personal identity. The emphasis on persons as moral agents has led to putting the ethical cart before the ontological horse, I argue. This chapter focuses on the use of ethics to justify these metaphysical conclusions. In the subsequent chapters, one will find my main original thesis: 'person' is an ontological term, not an ethical one. In section 3.1 I argue that personal identity questions and moral questions may be linked, but that they are distinct, and that one can talk about personal identity without talking about morals. Talking about persons does not commit us to moral realism; instead, it merely commits us to metaphysical realism. Section 3.2 shows what role ethics can play in justifying certain conclusions, specifically when one distinguishes between revisionary and descriptive metaphysics. I argue that the case of compatibilism versus determinism illustrates the distinction and provides an example when ethics, in some sense, is a proper motivation for metaphysical conclusions.

3.1 Ethics and Ontology
Recalling my earlier formalization of Strawson’s argument in section 2.3, one notices that there are precisely four too many premises in his argument, and that the normative aspect of his theory does little to nothing to further the case of episodic persons. Earlier in this thesis, I identified two distinct types of questions about personal identity. These were the metaphysical questions about identity-constitution and persistence and the epistemological questions about how we can know that some subject is a person. What I did not mention were the ethical questions that reveal themselves when surveying the literature on personal identity. Strawson, along with many who are working on narrative theories, confuses the debate by inserting moral premises into his argument. For example, in “Episodic Ethics” (2007), he argues that, while episodic persons might not be able to feel guilt in the sense that other philosophers insist they must, this is acceptable for moral practice because guilt is not a positive emotion, and is in fact a self-indulgent one. The fact of the matter about the nature of guilt is irrelevant here, because what Strawson is doing is equally egregious no matter what role guilt plays in ethics. His ethical argument about episodic persons has no application to whether or not they are persons or not. In fact, Strawson does not speak about identity-constitution or actual persistence conditions (whether of the self or of the human, since he makes this distinction as well). By doing this, the actual goal of personal identity debates is lost. What I am principally concerned with is whether or not some subject is the same experiencing subject through time. I take the persistence question to be the real question, and questions about the relation of ethics and personhood to be secondary.
Ethics does not play an essential role in ontology. That is my main criticism of this approach. It may even be the fact that there are ethical maxims that hold true about the world but that the world does not contain the necessary objects, persons, or conditions to allow the maxims to be carried out. Consider this example: assume that if there is a king one ought to serve him. This moral maxim can hold true even if a king does not exist. That is the nature of hypothetical imperatives. And it does not follow that, just because one ought to serve existent kinds, there are existent kings. The normativity of the statement plays no role in the ontology of the world. I take this to be an analogous case; persons may engage in moral practice, but that does not mean that persons are necessarily moral creatures, that person-talk presupposes moral-talk, or that moral norms affect the nature of persons.

Schechtman too makes Strawson's mistake, as do many narrative theorists and others working in the philosophy of personal identity. What I identified as her functionalist account of persons is misguided. One can even have faith in the efficacy of functionalist definitions of persons and their applicability to questions about the metaphysics of persistence and hold my view. Schechtman, like many in personal identity, notes the fact that persons are moral creatures, that by virtue of their personhood they have certain rights and responsibilities. Where she goes wrong is assuming without argument that persons are essentially moral creatures and that their defining features are the social and personal practices that comprise the four features.

It can be helpful to remember Locke’s original definition of persons. By Locke’s standards, persons must be intelligent and capable of thought, and they must be able to
consider themselves as themselves throughout time. When the intelligence, thought, or consideration is compromised, then the person no longer persists. I am of the opinion that Locke was generally right, and that his definition of persons is not fundamentally misguided. As others have noted before me, Locke’s definition is vague, and so it is the job of those who consider themselves intellectual descendants of Locke to provide a clear, coherent fleshing out of his original definition.

A reader who is knowledgeable about Locke will immediately recognize an irony in following Locke’s definition of a person but denying the normative aspects. Locke, after all, claims that ‘person’ is a forensic term, while I deny this. What is a person then? One possibility is that a person is a natural kind; another is that persons are a distinct set of objects that are not synonymous with some other set (for example, human beings). We may then introduce a different kind of normative device without having to presuppose moral realism. We can say that truth is normative, though in a non-moral sense. If one wants to properly describe the world, then one ought to use true statements. That is a normative aspect of the analysis, but one that does not need to invoke morals.

The questions “Do persons exist?” and “Under what conditions can organisms or agents be morally responsible?” are distinct. Each may have implications for one another; moral responsibility may necessitate that persons exist in this world, as persons are moral agents by some philosophers’ lights. But even if there are implications, I take the observation that they are two distinct questions to be a truism. The question really becomes this: if there are two distinct questions that have
commonly been conflated in personal identity debates, what significance can we draw from this new-found distinction? How does it inform the debate, and what theories does this distinction trouble?

By talking about persons, we commit ourselves to metaphysical realism, or at least to some variety of factualism. When talking about persons, we do not commit ourselves to moral realism. Or at least, on the surface it does not necessarily commit us to moral realism. We are discussing thinking, intelligent beings capable of self-characterization. Because of this, any explanation of persons that relies solely on metaphysical realism will be more parsimonious than one that relies on both metaphysical and moral realism. Why then have so many personal identity debates involved problems of morality? Some of the major books on the topic, from narrative and non-narrative theorists alike, have primarily concerned themselves with topics of morality.

Of course, there is some connection. It would be unreasonable to deny that. What is also unreasonable is to assume that, by discussing one, a philosopher is forced to discuss the other. But what if an intimate connection can be shown between personal identity and ethics, such that one must discuss personal identity to discuss certain moral problems? Even if that is the case, it does not follow that ethics must then be discussed in order to talk about personal identity. The relationship does not hold true in both directions. This stands to reason: if a philosopher is concerned about the ethics of punishment, then a philosopher must ask if the same person has persisted. If persistence is not accounted for, then the possibility of punishing a person for the
crimes of another become an issue. But what if a philosopher is merely concerned about persistence for persistence's sake? Should the ethics of punishment be taken into account? Certainly not. The ontological questions of personhood and persistence are methodologically prior to the ethical questions. Without answers to the ontological questions, there cannot be answers to the ethical questions. To discuss ethics and use it as the basis for ontology is misguided; it is the philosophical equivalent of buying a frame for a painting that does not exist yet, without even knowing the dimensions of the canvas.

This is Schechtman's mistake. What are persons? They are thinking beings, capable of considering themselves as themselves from one time to another. This allows them to become moral agents, but these moral capabilities do not make up the essence of what they are. Analogous cases can be shown. Persons are capable of writing and communicating, but this does not mean that they are primarily linguistic creatures; persons are capable of forming social relationships, but that does not mean that they are primarily social creatures; and, to further my main thesis, persons are capable of forming narratives, but this does not mean that they are primarily narrative creatures.

14 A possible objection to this rhetorical question: one cannot be interested in the persistence of persons for its own sake, as person is necessarily a normative or ethical term. I do not think this is a damning objection, however, as the idea of persons does not seem to imply ethics without question-begging against the moral anti-realist. 'Do persons exist?' and 'What makes some being a person?' are distinct questions from 'What are moral standards?' or 'What makes something morally right or wrong?' If it is the case that one cannot be interested in the persistence of persons for its own sake, then I have been gravely mistaken during this entire project.
Where should one go after dispensing with the ethical talk? Straight to the core matters: characterization and persistence. Locke offers a characterization, and I have already noted that I find this characterization suitable. By doing so, I place myself firmly in the psychological tradition. When empirically-minded philosophers and philosophically-minded scientists have been mindful of each other on issues within the psychological tradition, they have produced new and powerful observations about the nature of persons. An example of this is work done by both John Perry and Michael Gazzaniga (both found in Matthews et al 2009); while the two have never collaborated, both view the other’s work as sharing a common spirit with their own, showing that the neuroscientist and the philosopher can both make meaningful contributions to the debates about personal identity. But the ethicist does not have a role to play; moral theory simply isn’t relevant, similar to the way that political science or the epistemologist has no role to play when discussing constitution and persistence questions.\footnote{15Obviously, the epistemologist has some role to play, but only concerning epistemological questions.}

3.2 Proper Ethical Motivations

One might be worried by my treatment of ethics in the previous section, apparently rendering it useless except when discussing ethics \textit{qua} ethics. But I do believe that there is at least one kind of case where an appeal to ethics or ethical talk can motivate, in a weaker sense, metaphysical conclusions. But this is a special case;
and one that has little import into other areas of philosophical inquiry. Or at least I
believe so. It may be that the philosophical significance can be extended. However, I
am certain it does not affect my above point. The case I am referring to is a debate
within the philosophy of free will, namely that between the determinists and the
compatibilists.

Take determinism to be the thesis that all things within the universe are causally
determined by something prior, and that explanations for events can be given in terms
of causal chains. Some event occurs because of some prior event, and so on. The
determinist, within free will debates, additionally holds that human action or person
action is not given some place of privilege in the universe. It, too, is causally
determined by past events. Nothing is free in any sense of the word.

Take compatibilism to be the thesis that all things are causally determined, along
the same lines as determinism. But the compatibilists holds that human and person
action can still be regarded as free in a specific sense. The compatibilist holds that
human action is free if it is accordance with the appropriate kinds of desires. These
desires may themselves be causally determined (and most compatibilists hold that they
are), but once actions have occurred based on these desires, then the action is
considered free.

A proper reason for compatibilism is that without freedom in some sense one
cannot make sense of ethics. This can be treated as an argument from ethical practice.
Therefore, there is freedom. Usually, I would see this kind of argument as begging the question against the determinist. In fact, on the surface it appears to do just that. The determinist, based on his metaphysical commitments, is eliminating the possibility of moral responsibility. If something is not freely chosen, then the person who did it cannot be held morally responsible.

However, I do not think that the compatibilist is begging the question at all, provided that the main compatibilist thesis is modified slightly. Take the compatibilist to be embarking on a project within descriptive metaphysics, not revisionary metaphysics. Both of the projects can be worthwhile, and one large metaphysical project may attempt to do both. The determinist is simply doing revisionary metaphysics. The compatibilist, by arguing first for causal determinism about the world, is also doing revisionary metaphysics. But, once the compatibilist begins the important part of his project, he has begun to do descriptive metaphysics. The compatibilist project can be taken to concern a coherent interpretation of human practice. While the determinist says that we are not free, the compatibilist is asking how we can make sense of freedom talk within a determined world.

This is, I think, a fine example of using ethics to motivate a particular conclusion. But notice that this is not a question about what exists and how what exists behaves

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16 This distinction comes from P.F. Strawson's *Individuals* (2003). Strawson famously believed that metaphysicians were supposed to be engaging only in descriptive rather than revisionary metaphysics. While I and others disagree, the distinction proves useful in cases like the one I am outlining currently.
(that is the first part of the compatibilist thesis, but not the defining part). The question is how a philosophical account of human action can salvage parts of language and discourse. The line of thought goes something like this: people talk about moral responsibility and free will, but how does that make sense in a determined world? It makes sense because what people really mean by 'free' is not what we have previously thought. We merely revise a definition in order to properly describe the way that people act.

Chapter 4: Are We Narrative?
What I have said is not a knock-down argument against narrative theorists. All I have shown, or tried to show, is that ethical reasons do not justify metaphysical arguments, at least metaphysical arguments in the philosophy of personal identity, and that Schechtman's thesis, which claims that the holding of a self-told narrative and being a person are logically equivalent, is too strong, as it is not necessarily the case that persons hold self-narratives. There are, I note, two separate theses, one empirical and one metaphysical. The empirical question asks about persons in this world, while the metaphysical question asks about persons across all worlds. The rejection of the terms’ logical equivalence reduces the narrative thesis to an empirical one about this world. But the current views in psychology do not seem to hold that narrative is as strong a force in persons' lives as Schechtman suggests. The advantages to using this empirical data are only gained if Schechtman's theory is not a necessity argument. The a priori nature of her argumentation would suggest initially that her argument is a necessity argument. But, because the term 'person' and the term 'one who holds a self-narrative' are not analytic, we should be skeptical of narrative being a necessary feature that would hold true of all persons in all possible worlds. So Schechtman's argument, in its most defensible form, becomes a contingency argument. It happens to be the case that persons in this world all hold self-narratives. But this is a posteriori and can therefore be disproven through contrary experience.

4.1 Science and Identity Constitution
As was noted in previous chapters, the narrative view places four restrictions on persons. They are that persons must be narrative in form, that this narrative must have the logic and form of a story, that this story must specifically be about a person’s life, and that the narrative must be conventional and linear. Schechtman is emphasizing what I have called the strong sense of narrative, and Strawson has shown, quite convincingly, that the strong sense of narrative does not seem to be a necessary condition of persons. The argument for it is relatively simple: can one conceive of non-narrative persons? If so, then narrative is not necessary for personhood. This is a non-normative variation on Strawson’s argument. In addition to lacking a moral element, my argument has fewer premises. All one must accept is that the conceivability of some fact, object, or state of events that contradicts a theory should count as evidence against said theory, or that the conceivability of a contrary case speaks against the necessity of a theory. To put it another way, neither the statement “All persons are narrative in form” nor the statement “All persons have the ability to form self-narratives” are analytic. This lack of analyticity shows that there possible worlds in which there are non-narrative persons.

The more interesting question is whether or not we reside in such a world. Strawson says that we do. However, Strawson is vague, both in “Against Narrativity” and “Episodic Ethics”, about the details of non-narrative persons. He claims that there is an abundance of examples to be found of episodic persons (who are necessarily non-narrative) within some great works of literature; this is immediately unsatisfying. Literature, while beautiful and fulfilling, is hardly evidence for a metaphysical debate.
Without diverting too far into a separate issue, it can be provisionally said that literature involves various degree of make-believe and pretend. The specific degree of each work can be debated; in fact, that may be what most literary critics are actually debating. But scientists, especially the current work in the brain-based sciences, hopefully strive to eliminate make-believe in providing accounts of the world.

Empirical evidence suggests that persons may utilize narrative in order to make sense of the world, though not in the extreme way that Lamarque (1990) describes. But the narratives described are moderate; they seem to lack the kinds of features narrative theorists require. Peter V. Rabins and David M. Blass, while discussing split-brain patients, that

Roger Sperry...and his student Michael Gazzaniga were able to demonstrate that such individuals, and presumably all humans, have a center in the left hemisphere that strives to “make sense” of or develop narratives about events that are occurring. (Rabins and Blass 2011; 45)

So there is presumably some form of narration going on. There are two conclusions Rabins and Blass draw from Sperry and Gazzaniga, one modest and one extreme. Modestly, they hold that “these elegant experiments suggest that human beings have a module in the left hemisphere that seeks to make sense of events by constructing a narrative that links facts together into a coherent whole” (ibid). They also apparently

17 Lamarque argues that the utilization of stories is the only way to gain knowledge if one is an empiricist. Luckily, there is at least one simple solution out of Lamarque’s problem: denying that knowledge is only gained through experience. If the a priori has any role to play in human knowledge, then his radical conclusion is false.
hold an extreme claim that the center “participates in the construction, maintenance, and modification of a personal identity by linking together life experiences into a unique, comprehensive, and comprehensible narrative that we refer to as personal identity” (ibid).

Rabins and Blass speak too strongly here, and sound very much like empirical scientists that have become narrative theorists. But within pages, they moderate their claims, holding instead that narrative is one component of the complex construction of personal identity in human persons. If one were to think of human being’s capacity for constructing personal identity, it would include several features. Each of these features can in theory be mapped to certain areas of the brain. According to Rabins and Blass, these include self-recognition, which can be mapped to the left prefrontal cortex, and in the case of “patients whose corpus callosum had been surgically cut, the left hemisphere was more activated in recognizing self” (Rabins and Blass 2011; 47); memory, specifically self-referential memory, possibly located in the medial prefrontal cortex; and sensorimotor capacities. All of these contribute to the sense of self that persons have.

Rabins and Blass do emphasize the role of narrative in persons’ lives, and I do

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18 Rabins and Blass do point out that the findings about split-brain patients have not been successfully replicated by every researcher.

19 Phineas Gage, the man who survived a rail road spike penetrating his skull, suffered severe damage to his left frontal lobe. First-hand account noted that he became difficult to deal with after his accident, as he changed so drastically that people began to regard him as a different person altogether. He is a famous case in neuroscience and, because of his apparent loss of identity, an interesting case in empirical inquiry of personal identity.
not think that my overall thesis is weakened by accepting that narrative plays some role. Strawson, on the other hand, is worse for the wear, at least when discussing human persons. My conceivability argument about the possibility of episodic persons, found in section 4.1, does not seem to be affected, by virtue of there being a possible world in which persons exist and yet there no narratives, whether self-held or not. But, as I discuss in the next section, characterizing narrative as an identity-constituting feature, and specifically as the identity-constituting feature of persons, is not a sufficient account of the world that we live in.

Rabins and Blass also frequently refer to personal identity as a constructive enterprise. If a theory claims that persons are constructed, presumably by themselves, then there are some possibly fatal problems for that view. The next section specifically addresses the problem of constructive narrative identity, particularly the problem of change and persistence in a constructive identity.

4.2 Memory and Identity

It should now be clear that the narrative view is unnecessarily limiting and that it does not fully account for all actual and possible persons. The narrative view is too

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20 Here, I think, is the key to understanding the problem of Schechtman. Imagine a possible world in which there are persons, capable of reason and reflection, and yet the concept of storytelling does not exist. This shows that the concept of persons and the concept of self-held narratives are separate. There can be one without the other. One may initially point out that, just because the persons do not have the idea of stories, this does not imply that they do not have self-held (or implicit) narratives. First, that seems to indicate a desire to insert narratives into an explanation even when it isn't needed. Second, it indicates the strong claim of logical equivalence between persons and beings holding self-narratives. hmm
restrictive, yes, but it also provides an improper account of Schechtman’s four features. There are two separate theses, one empirical and one metaphysical. The empirical question asks how persons in this world are constituted and how they persist, and the metaphysical question asks what the necessary features of persons in all worlds are. In this section, my contention is simple: If sameness of consciousness cannot account for a single experiencing subject over time, then neither can narrative. If narrative can account for a single experiencing subject over time, then so can sameness of consciousness. Sameness of consciousness has fewer requirements for personhood while having the same explanatory power. Therefore it is more parsimonious. It is a simpler theory, which is a virtue, but also has sufficient explanatory power and adequacy to the data. Narrative can therefore be rejected as an identity-constituting feature.

What is the similarity between consciousness and narrative that makes my contention valid? Namely, it is the way that consciousness and narrative are both changing over time. Schechtman’s primary criticism of psychological theories of personal identity have been that they cannot account for a single experiencing subject because, when pressed for clarification, they are forced to phrase sameness of consciousness over time in terms of similarity relations. It is not that consciousness persists; it is that a consciousness at some time $T_2$ resembles, with extraordinary closeness, an earlier consciousness at some time $T_1$. But a resemblance relationship cannot adequately prove persistence. At best it proves resemblance. Thus, the psychological view must be rejected as it cannot make sense of the persistence of
persons.\(^{21}\)

But narrative suffers from the same problems that consciousness does, and any attempt to salvage the narrative view will inevitably save the psychological view as well. There, my earlier parsimony argument becomes more convincing. Narrative changes over time, as does consciousness, and there rests its fatal flaw. A narrative theorist, in a quick attempt to save narrative from even the beginning of criticism, can say that it is a unique property of narrative that it grows and changes over time—as the life story of a person extends into the future, so will their self-held identity-constituting narrative. Granted, this is an *ad hoc* gesture and can be dismissed as such (and, one can ask, why is this a unique property of narrative that cannot be held by consciousness alone?), but one can tentatively accept this revision and still have a further problem. Narrative is, seemingly by necessity, an interpretive enterprise. Even without some grand, overarching meaning or purpose to the narrative, there are interpretations of events going on at all times when narratives are constructed. Judgments are made as to what caused what; persons are constantly assessing their positions and origins. This interpretation is invariably tied to memory. This at first seems trivially true: Of course interpretation is tied to memory, because without memory there is quite literally nothing for the person to interpret.

Memory, though, has an interesting feature in that it does not remain it static. Memory is not compiled and stored in the way that computer stores information. One,

\(^{21}\) This, I should clarify, is Schechtman's position and not my own.
there is no outside agent giving commands of which memories to recall and when.
Two, memories do not remain as accurate archives of information. In one sense, memories are corrupted by the emotional state of the agent at the time of reflection. When a person looks back and reflects on himself and his memories, he reinterprets and colors these memories with his emotions at the time. Memory, in this regard, is an interpretive enterprise in the same way that narrative is described to be. This is perhaps the most speculative part of my argument, because the relationship between memory and emotion has not been fully explored, but results from those working in the brain-based sciences (psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science) appear to frequently be discovering new findings that strongly suggest that our memory cannot be thought of in the traditional sense, where it is seen as a picture of an earlier time that can be accessed at any other time. For example, the results of recent studies suggest that there is a mood-congruence effect, where memories are more easily accessed when they reflect the emotional state a person is already in. The empirical data does not suggest that memory is a fixed thing, persisting through time and remaining numerically identical. Like persons, memory persists through qualitative identity.²²


There is also a philosophical account of memory that undermines narrative views. In his more recent work on signs, Godfrey-Smith (2012) has suggested that memory can be thought as a kind of internal messaging system for organisms.

Drawing on Brian Skyrms and David Lewis in Signs (2010) and Conventions (1969)
respectively, Godfrey-Smith outlines a general theory of signs that he hopes can account for the way organisms communicate with one another in addition to how they communicate within themselves. According to Godfrey-Smith, the meaning of signs is dependent on the establishment of an evolutionarily stable environment, where there has been some kind of adaptation or survival benefit for the use of these signs. While Lewis’ earlier analysis was limited to cases for where there is shared, mutual interest and this interest was perfectly stable, Skyrms and Godfrey-Smith show that this does not have to be the case if we are attempting to create a general theory of signs. The relevance of this theory of signs to personal identity and narrative is not immediately clear. The point that I make here is highly speculative. It may be the case that memory is not best thought of in this way. But if it is the case that memory is to be thought of a signal system within organisms in a similar way that language is a signal system between organisms, then it becomes clear that memory is hardly the kind of thing that would count as identity-constituting. Memory is something that is interpreted by the receiver. The unique feature, that the receiver is the same as the sender, is not the part that matters and can mostly be ignored in the analysis.

There has been no work to my knowledge linking the scientific and philosophical consensus on memory to a theory of signs like the ones offered by Lewis, Skyrms, and Godfrey-Smith, but one should be able to see some important connections. Allowing for some evolutionary speculation, consider the possibility that memory plays some evolutionarily significant role in an organism’s fitness. This easily stays in line with certain theories of fitness, as it should be able to benefit an
organism, nearly regardless of the environment, though not entirely regardless of the environment. Still, the general theory of signs, specifically by Skyrms and Godfrey-Smith, seems right to me (though, as Skyrms rightfully admits, it is only a proto-philosophy of language), and it seems generally consistent with the scientific consensus on memory. That memory is a sign that is sent by an organism at one time in order to be received by that same organism at a later time is not a radical idea, and once Skyrms' and Godfrey-Smith's modifications to Lewis' theory are accepted (namely, getting rid of the requirement that there must be shared self-interest in the signal, or that the language game must be at equilibrium), it becomes clearer how these two ideas can complement over time. Why does memory change? Because the organism changes, and so the way in which the organism interprets the signal changes. Memory becomes interpretive because it is a sign, and signs must be interpreted by virtue of them being treated as signs by some receiver.

The memory-as-signal theory of Godfrey-Smith is also consistent with other philosophical accounts of memory, at least in some respects, and in fact explains something which I take issue with in some of the philosophical literature. Memory has been characterized as having first an essential indexing feature. Persons perceive memory, and “the perception must be experienced as something that has been experienced before” (Bernecker 2007; 14). One can see this in Locke when writing on memory, as well as in more contemporary work. But there is a second feature, and it is with it that I see deep problems. It is the idea that memory, or at least propositional memory, is truth-entailing or veridical. That is to say, a propositional memory cannot
be false (c.f. Norman Malcom). Here I think that philosophers have gone too far. This is because they have defined memory as an indexed perception that is truly experienced by a subject. But I believe there are two distinct ways that memory can go awry.

First, a man—call him Jones—can forget that he had coffee at breakfast. This man, for present purposes, should be assumed to have known he was having coffee and not tea with his breakfast. Eventually, he can come to believe that he did not have coffee at breakfast, but rather tea. He can do this because he has the indexed perception of drinking a hot, dark liquid at breakfast. He is rightfully remembering that he had a hot, dark liquid with breakfast, but he also believes himself to remember drinking tea. It could very well be part of the same sign. What has changed? Well, Jones has. And his method of interpreting memory-signals has changed as well, even in an ever so slight way. Philosophers who want to hold that he is not remembering at all, but is simply delusional, I think will be hard-pressed to show in principle why this cannot be counted as a false memory and instead must be thought of as some aberrant function of a faulty mind.

It may even be the case that memory can lose its indexed feature. Suppose that, as a child, Jones went to a zoo on a class trip. Suppose that Jones was found trying to climb over the railing at the bear exhibit, and he was punished by his teacher for doing so. Jones may, later in life, forget that it was he who tried to climb over the railing, but he may still remember that someone in his class was punished for doing so. He has lost a supposedly essential feature—remembering that the sensation or experience has
occurred to him before. Once again, I do not think this is a case of aberrant activity of a faulty mind; I think that it is a case of signals being reinterpreted by persons who have persisted and changed throughout time.

If memory and narrative share this interpretive feature, what significance can we draw from their similarities? Simply put, that neither memory nor narrative is sufficient for the establishment of personhood if we are using Schechtman’s criteria. Schechtman takes great pains to avoid the resemblance relation, and according to her the resemblance relation cannot establish a single experiencing being over time. Narrative is offered as the alternative that can ensure this single experiencing being over time because it can persist through time; however, it cannot persist through time in some privileged way that consciousness cannot. Therefore, one should reject the narrative view as an account of the persistence of persons throughout time.

4.3 Causal Histories

Persons persist, or at least we have a deep belief that persons persist. Persons are also intimately linked to their consciousness or psychology. These are two statements that I think are, while not self-evident, highly intuitive. My sketch of memory above may have overreached, calling into question the intuitive belief that persons persist because of the second belief about the relationship to consciousness and psychology. So we obviously need to do something about the sketch of memory, or else abandon the conjunctive thesis I just mentioned. Another concern is that I have taken an
empirical fact—that memory is mutable—and drawn too significant of a conclusion from it, namely that a constructive identity cannot be based on memory (as narrative must be) because of this mutability. I think that this concern is warranted, but that it is not fatal. Any presence of change will deeply trouble the constructive view of the narrative theorists as I have described previously. The problem can be stated as follows: the mutability of memory will trouble a psychological view in the same way that it troubles a narrative view. Earlier I made a parsimony argument, saying that we should favor consciousness theories because they postulate fewer features. However, parsimony is a heuristic device. Occam's Razor is not a logical tool; it is a rule of thumb that we generally believe to be truth-directive. But a general belief about it is not enough to favor one view over another when both face a similar problem. Because of this, I will argue in this section that one may try to save narrative views by adding a further feature to them that negates my memory objection. However, by adding this further feature, one loses some of the important benefits that narrative supposedly offers.

The presence of change does not affect what we will call the causal narrative view. A causal narrative view will encapsulate all of the relevant features of the typical narrative view, including the emphasis on construction, but will also add the addendum that narrative states must be placed in a causal order to each other. To be clearer, in order for there to be a persistent narrative, there must be a causal link between various narrative states for a given person. A person constructs a narrative initially, and each time a new narrative is constructed further in the future, there must
a causal claim attached. The person creates a sort of meta-narrative, or a narrative of his narratives. The earlier narratives can be said to affect the later narratives, in some sense determining or influencing the later narratives. There is a looping effect of narratives. By holding a self-narrative, a person considers himself in narrative terms. Considering himself in narrative terms can then lead to a new way of looking at future events, thus changing how they are incorporated into the self-narrative.

Unfortunately, a causal addendum does not save narrative in the way that one might hope. It first leads to the rather unsatisfactory conclusion that a person must hold an infinite number of narratives. A person must hold an infinite number of narratives because no narrative is sufficient for identity-preservation until another meta-narrative has been constructed; there is no special class of narrative that suddenly makes it possible for this to not be the case (say, at the eleventh iteration of the narrative). Holding an infinite number of narratives seems to conflict with the idea of mental representation. Namely, it conflicts with the intuitively plausible idea that persons do not have infinite representations of anything, or that the sum of a given person’s representations is less than infinity.

4.4 Worries and Conclusions

I believe to have established that the narrative view, at least as presented by Schechtman, fails to account for the persistence of persons through time. Additionally,
I am skeptical that narrative can appropriately account for the constitution of persons. I have made some comments that would favor psychological accounts of personal identity. However, I would like to mention a few worries before concluding.

First, while all of my intuitions lean towards psychological theories, I am becoming increasingly suspect of the distinction between body theories and psychology theories. It may be the case that human beings, being the only case of persons we are sure of at the present time, are more holistic than psychological theorists have suggested. The brain may be influenced in an important way by the body, calling into question the body/psychology distinction that most philosophers accept when debating about personal identity. Perhaps body and psychology theories are more amenable to one another than is assumed in the literature suggests currently. At this time, we simply do not know what is the case. The brain is currently an area of vast study, in both philosophy and in the sciences, and the way it functions is still very much a mystery in many important respects. As science progresses, things will become clearer, and the current view, which silently presupposes a kind of isolation of the brain may turn out to be wrong.\(^2\) Currently, however, it is an open question.

Second, my critique of ethical motivations could benefit from some fleshing out in certain regards. As this thesis was not intended to be on topics within metaethics, certain problems were ignored. One section, in which I wanted to argue that some ethical theories like sentimentalism could explain moral semantics without

\(^2\) For example, thought experiments concerning brains in vats may be shown to be misguided because the brain cannot function without the body in a non-trivial sense.
presupposing moral agents, was completely left out due to a lack of relevance to the main topic.

What philosophers have become very good at in personal identity is showing problems in positive views. Schechtman took the opposite route, and should be commended for doing so. Her book is well-written and, despite my extensive criticisms, I admire her work. However, I believe her positions to be threatened by many criticisms, some of which I believe to be original to me. I have not mentioned standard philosophical counter-examples in personal identity, like fission or fusion problems. Others have noted before me that Schechtman's account has nothing to say about these problems. I believe they are right; the narrative view suffers from the same problems as every other theory in the contemporary field. My endorsement of psychological theories is, admittedly, intuition-based and not the product of a particular, knock-down argument.

Overall though, I believe that I have been successful in my point, which is refuting Schechtman’s narrative view of persons. In the future, my criticisms could be expanded to other narrative theories, most likely with varying degrees of success. So while I am not certain about many things, including the nature of persons or by what mechanism they persist, I am certain that the narrative view is false, and that most attempts to save it would simultaneously undermine the initial reasons for such a view. While it’s true that Persons, or at least humans, are story-tellers, But we are not

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24Narrative theories of action most likely would not be affected by what I have said. Or, at least it is not obvious to me that they would.
primarily story-tellers. Constructing narratives is one of many interesting things we do. No matter how many stories we tell, I do not think it is the case that we are the product of the stories, at least not in a deep metaphysical sense. A person is a thinking, intelligent being, capable of recognizing itself as itself from one time to the next.


–. “The Evolution of Meaning.” Presented as the Thatcher Lecture at George Washington University, April 2012.


Hutto, Daniel D. “Narrative and Understanding Persons,” in *Narrative and


