

## Introduction

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The idea that human beings experience their lives as some sort of story and tend to understand themselves as authors of a narrative has become increasingly popular in philosophy. Some philosophers suggest that narratives are indispensable when it comes to answering the traditional question associated with personal (numerical) identity: what makes it the case that the person considered at time  $t_0$  is the same person as the person considered at time  $t_1$ ? They claim that taking a narrative approach to this question allows for avoiding some of the problems that arise when attempting to answer it in terms of biological or psychological continuity. Other philosophers point out that narratives primarily have a unifying role with respect to our actions, experiences, beliefs, desires, and character traits. They take narratives to answer what Marya Schechtman (1996) calls “the characterization” question, in that narratives structure our self-experience and characterize us as unique individuals.

In this special issue, we consider these two conceptions of narrative identity in more detail, and explore their connection to moral responsibility and social cognition. We begin by addressing two fundamental issues at the heart of the current debate.

First, Lynne Rudder-Baker discusses the relationship between self-narrative and personal identity, and claims that any account of narrative self-constitution presupposes an answer to the question of personal (numerical) identity. Hence, Schechtman’s view that self-narratives create persons cannot be the whole story. According to Rudder-Baker, persons should be distinguished by a robust first-person perspective, i.e. a capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first person. She contrasts her realist account of the self with Daniel Dennett’s view that selves are simply fictional entities. In his reply to Rudder-Baker, Dennett argues that the self is not an illusion but rather a

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theoretical abstraction, like the Equator or a center of gravity. Dennett also dismisses the charge that he understands the brain as an author by asserting his point that the brain is capable of generating a narrative *without* being an author. In a short follow-up, Rudder-Baker reasserts her claim and insists that brains cannot narrate, only persons can.

Second, Daniel Hutto critically examines the relationship between narrative self-shaping and self-experience. According to Hutto, the problem with the strong forms of narrative self-shaping endorsed by, for example, Rudd (2012) or Schechtman (1996) is their reliance on a notion of implicit narrativizing. However, we lack a substantive account of what implicit narrativizing is, and we lack good reasons to believe that it actually occurs. Hutto therefore proposes a modest version of narrative self-shaping instead, coupled with a developmental proposal regarding the narrative basis of our folk psychological competence.

In his reply to Hutto, Anthony Rudd defends the notion of implicit narrativizing and argues against the plausibility of non-narrative forms of self-shaping. However, according to Rudd, when we consider Hutto's argument against strong narrative self-shaping in any detail, it actually supports rather than undermines the claim that self-evaluation must take a narrative form. He also indicates some of the difficulties arising from Hutto's modest version of narrative self-shaping. In particular, if Hutto accepts the conceptual claim that action explanation must take a narrative form, then his narrative self-shaping hypothesis is not simply an empirical thesis, which means its relationship to the narrative practice hypothesis, which Hutto also endorses, must be re-thought.

Fleur Jongepier also criticizes the link between narrative self-shaping and narrative self-experience, but unlike Hutto she does not believe that we should give up on implicit narrativizing altogether. Instead, she proposes construing implicit narrativizing as an enabling condition *for*, rather than something that presents itself *in*, experience. In Jongepier's constitutive account, the coherence and intelligibility of our experiences is explained by them being anchored in a larger, diachronic context.

The next two articles in this special issue elaborate on the consequences of narrative self-shaping for views of embodiment and human agency, questioning whether narratives have the power to shape our bodies or even our pasts.

Priscilla Brandon argues that most proponents of embodiment either view the body as a formal pre-condition for narrative or present the connection between the body and the narrative self as a primarily unidirectional relationship. Using examples from psychotherapy, feminist philosophy, and theory of mind, Brandon argues for an interactive relationship instead: the body does not only shape the narrative self, but the narrative self also shapes the body.

Roman Altshuler discusses narrative self-shaping in relation to practical deliberation and self-control. He evaluates John Martin Fischer's claim that our lives have a narrative value that can be realized by means of what in the free will debate is referred to as "guidance control." According to Altshuler, narratives enable "retroactive self-constitution": we can change ourselves and what happened in the past through the narratives we tell now.

The articles that follow move away from narrative self-shaping and its implications to consider the role of narratives more generally for moral responsibility.

Marion Smiley argues that volitional excuses—for example, pleas of ignorance and mental incompetence—should be understood as self-narratives, which we exchange, accept, and reject on an everyday basis. Hence, volitional excuses offer an excellent

opportunity to improve our understanding of what we consider appropriate standards of blameworthiness, and why. Moreover, when we focus on the value of fairness in our exchange of volitional excuses, we can articulate a set of criteria to establish non-responsibility for cases in which we are not in control or do not know what we are doing.

Steven Delay claims that narratives are neither sufficient nor necessary for genuine responsibility and self-understanding. His line of argument resembles Rudder-Baker's point regarding the necessity of first-person perspective: no matter what practical identity we assume, there is always an unchanging subjectivity underneath. Using examples from Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and Voltaire, he also highlights how narratives can invite self-deception and as such undermine our responsibility rather than constitute it.

The concluding two papers of this special issue focus on the role of narratives in our development as social beings. First, Zuzanna Rucinska explores the relationship between narratives and pretend play. She argues against "mental guiders" accounts of pretense, and instead proposes an explanation in terms of environmental affordances and socially scaffolded engagements. According to her proposal, narrative practices allow us to further frame and elaborate on acts of pretend play.

Finally, Anika Fiebich investigates narrative practice from a cross-cultural perspective, in relation to empirical studies on the development of false belief understanding. She shows that so-called "mentalistic narrative practices," which involve an explicit reference to another person's mental states, correlate with the development of false belief understanding but do not play a key role. Although the developmental findings on false belief understanding are best explained in terms of a folk psychological theory, Fiebich argues that narrative practices provide the best account of how we come to understand another agent's reasons in everyday life.

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