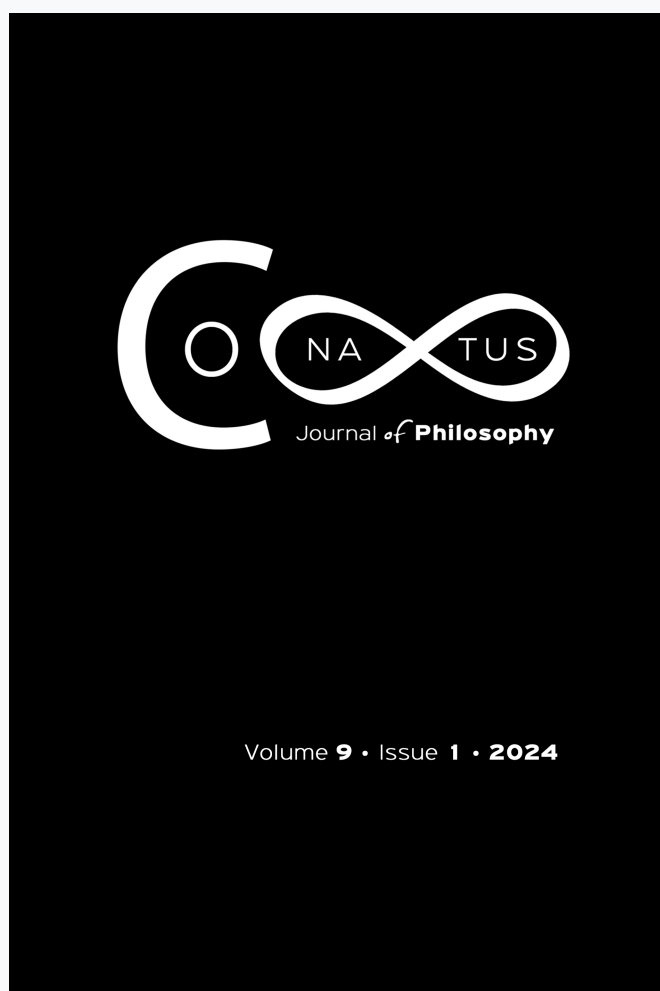


Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 9, No 1 (2024)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



Can Narratoscepticism Be a Valid Alternative? A Critique of Strawson's Episodicity Argument

Vladimir Lukić

doi: [10.12681/cjp.31509](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.31509)

Copyright © 2024, Vladimir Lukic



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Lukić, V. (2024). Can Narratoscepticism Be a Valid Alternative? A Critique of Strawson's Episodicity Argument. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9(1), 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.31509>

Can Narratoscepticism Be a Valid Alternative? A Critique of Strawson's Episodicity Argument

Vladimir Lukić

University of Pardubice, Czech Republic; University of Antwerp, Belgium

E-mail address: vladimir.lukic@student.upce.cz

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8455-9543>

Abstract

This paper argues against Galen Strawson's criticism of the narrativist identity thesis. Strawson points out that the narrativist thesis fails to portray those with an episodic perception of themselves. I claim that episodicity is rather problematic and that we should question the validity of this notion. The first step in this goal is to decipher Strawson's basis of the self which is an amalgam between the cultural and social and is perceived differently by different people. Afterwards, I will try to use the claims derived from Strawson's basis and apply the critique of his method. I pose a question about the relationship between episodic and diachronic and, ultimately, argue that both culturally and biologically, assuming the diachronic aspect of the self is necessary, apart from the very small number of cases. In this sense, the main conclusion is that Strawson's thesis is limiting but does not pose a valid alternative to the narrativist identity thesis.

Keywords: *the self; narrativity thesis; episodicity; diachronicity; Galen Strawson*

I. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to argue against the account of narratoscepticism, usually associated with Galen Strawson. In the following argument, we will discuss the episodic/diachronic differences and limit Strawson's claim. To successfully do that, the narrativist account should be given a general outlook in order for his

criticism to have a target. In this regard, this paper will have the following structure: i. portray the narrativist outlook, ii. provide the necessary parts of Strawson's argument against the narrativist account, and iii. limit the criticism by arguing against the scope of episodicity.

Let us, therefore, begin by considering the narrativist account of *the self*. What might benefit this paper in this exploration is the fact that the notion of narrativity has been at the center of philosophical investigation for decades now. As Anthony Rudd puts it:

Over the last two or three decades, various philosophers, including MacIntyre, Taylor, and Ricoeur (as well as psychologists, sociologists, theologians, and others) have argued that the notion of narrative has a central role to play in our thinking about personal identity and about ethics.¹

Now, what is this narrative and what is its nature? Various philosophers take various accounts of the narrative. The mere portrayal of the narrativist thesis is a big challenge. At the same time, portraying the notion of the narrative is not the main goal of this paper and it would be very useful to use the already established categorization of types of narrative projects. One of these categorizations is offered by Marya Schechtman, a philosopher who has argued for the psychological narrativity thesis since the mid-1990s.

The psychological narrativity thesis has been developed as an alternative to the psychological continuity theory. Instead of thinking about *the self* as an aggregate of the different time slices, the psychological narrativity thesis takes *the self* to be in the form of unity.² This unity is exhibited in the form of a narrative. Therefore, when we are asked who we are we give a narrative answer. For example, if a person X is asked who they are, they can answer, "I am a philosopher, a child of person Y, a parent to person Z, I have been educated in the X institution, my interests include X1, Y1, Z1..." Insofar as we answer in the following form, we are narrating our own lives. This is, of course, a general insight, and many philosophers have given their account of narrativity. On one hand, we have narrative hermeneuticists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Paul Ricoeur, who regard *the selves* as essentially narrative. Without perceiving ourselves as narra-

¹ Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity-Reply to Lippitt," *Inquiry* 50, no. 5 (2007): 541.

² Marya Schechtman, *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 100.

tive beings, we cannot make sense of the world around us or ourselves. Schechtman places one narrativist view in contrast to the narrative hermeneutics. This view is often attributed to Daniel Dennett.³ Dennett's view entails that *the self* does not exist, rather it is just an assumption that we use to portray ourselves by narration.⁴ Other views, according to Schechtman, are placed in between these two, along with her own.⁵ However, the line of thought that all of these views share is the fact that we constitute ourselves within a narrative framework, we have the unity of experiences/beliefs and a diachronic continuity.

II. Setting up the groundwork: Ethical and psychological thesis

The primary step we need to take is to create a bridge between narrativism and Strawson's critique. In this sense, we would portray narrativism through two different claims – psychological claim and ethical claim. Although it is true that, in the theories that the narrativists propose, the psychological thesis is subsumed under the case for the ethical thesis, in this subchapter we will describe the main points of these claims and establish a correlation among the main points that the narrativists share. The concepts we will need for this endeavor are the following – social hermeneutics, intelligibility, ethical action, and self-constitution.

Let us start with social hermeneutics. We are all born in a specific context, in a specific community, in a specific position, in a specific tradition. What we are, namely the constitution of our beliefs, ideas, goals, and ethical strivings is dependent on this very basis. Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Merentoja, both of them being narrative hermeneuticists, argue that “in a nutshell, the basic claim of all modern hermeneutics is that human understanding is mediated. It is mediated through sociocultural circumstances, history, and signs – particularly, language.”⁶

In short, a view of narrative hermeneutics states that the narratives are necessarily politically and socially induced and that, as a conse-

³ Marya Schechtman, “The Narrative Self,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher, 394-415 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 396.

⁴ Daniel Dennett, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity,” in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, eds. Frank S. Kessel, Pamela M. Cole, and Dale L. Johnson, 105-115 (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992), 105.

⁵ Schechtman, “The Narrative Self,” 398.

⁶ Jens Brockmeier and Hanna Merentoja, “Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics,” *Story-Worlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 4.

quence, individuals find themselves deciphering meaning within that world.⁷ It is a contextual thesis that tends to emphasize the experience, both passive and active.

The second notion is the notion of intelligibility, coined by Alasdair MacIntyre. Intelligibility, according to MacIntyre's theory, is the basis of human action and responsibility.⁸ To understand an action as intelligible, we must contextualize that action within the whole state of things regarding a tradition. We can look at intelligibility as one framework of reason-giving which is unified with the distinct conception of the human striving within one context. That is to say, one action presupposes the whole infrastructure of motives, beliefs, and events that are a part of a given social situation. Intelligibility explains the unification of practices. Namely, our actions are guided by being connected to the context which is shaped by the practices and human/political relations.

Ethical action is at the heart of the narrativity thesis. This is probably best exhibited in the theoretical strivings of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur is constructing the theory of the narrative *self* so that he can explain the basic notion of ethical action based on deliberation. That is to say, to answer the question "What I should do?" we need to answer the questions "What am I?" and "Who am I?" first.⁹ In this regard, ethical action is somewhere between the notions of social hermeneutics, intelligibility, and self-constitution.

Finally, the narrative self-constitution is the unificatory principle based on which we constitute our idea of *the self* in terms of the history of our experiences within a specific framework. By asking the questions "Who am I?" and "What am I?" we refer to the story about our place in the world, in comparison with other beings in the world, and the history of our correspondence with the world. We constitute ourselves as narrative beings when we refer to things such as these.

Now, what is the ethical narrativity thesis (ENT) and what is the psychological narrativity thesis (PNT)? In short, ENT stresses the importance of following the narrative in our ethical actions. For something to be considered 'good,' it must be intelligible through the idea of goodness that is contextually based on the context in which we find ourselves. On the other hand, PNT argues that our constitution

⁷ Hanna Merentoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History and the Possible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 50.

⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 208.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 122.

of *the self* is purely narrativist and that to understand ourselves we construct stories that we derive from the world that we are getting to know through the process of hermeneutics and our relation to it. In this sense, PNT is diachronic since it is all-encompassing and renders our whole lives relevant (past-present-future) in the process of self-constitution.

III. Strawson's narratoscepticism: A portrayal and a critique

Now that we have determined the discussion of the narrative *self* that this paper is considering, it is important to present an answer to the most famous contemporary challenge to this view posed by Galen Strawson. This needs to be addressed because of the length of Strawson's perspective and the impact it had on the contemporary academic field. When dealing with the narrativist theory, one simply cannot leave Strawson's challenge unanswered. The first step is, therefore, for us to get familiar with his argument, which has changed over the years during his discussion with Marya Schechtman. Having in mind the importance of the debate between narratosceptics and narrativists, one needs to portray Strawson's position which goes by the name of narratoscepticism.

Firstly, it should be noted that Strawson's view has been formulated in order to attack the two views of narrative theory previously mentioned, namely the psychological narrativity thesis (PNT) and the ethical narrativity thesis (ENT).¹⁰ We shall, primarily, consider Strawson's attack on the psychological narrativity thesis. The philosophers whom Strawson directly mentions as endorsing the narrativist thesis are MacIntyre, Taylor, Ricoeur, and Schechtman.¹¹ The critique stands on the grounds of differentiating between diachronic and episodic notions of *the self*. By the diachronic notions of *the self*, Strawson means that "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."¹²

Whereas by the episodic notions, he means that "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."¹³

Considering these definitions, in light of our earlier portrayal of the narrative *self*, one might notice that Strawson's argument attacks

¹⁰ Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 429.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 434-437.

¹² *Ibid.*, 430.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the continuation theory. Connecting it back to the preceding discussion on Ricoeur's theory, this would mean problematizing uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time. But let us expand on this later. For now, the focus is on presenting Strawson's position.

Now, Strawson introduces the notions of the narrative and non-narrative which are correlated to the episodic and diachronic notions of *the self*. According to Strawson, diachronic are usually narrative, while episodics are usually non-narrative.¹⁴ However, albeit usual, this is not always the case. There are four models of *the self*, or, as Strawson would call them, four temporal temperaments based on the combination of the categories offered. The combinations also determine the truth values of the PNT and ENT in their relation.¹⁵

- i. PNT and ENT are true. If both PNT and ENT are true, then we are deeply narrative in our deliberation. Concurrently, the right ethical act or a just political decision is based on its intelligibility within a specific narrative structure.
- ii. PNT is true, ENT is false. This truth value relation means that we are narrative in our thinking, but that has nothing to do with our morality. Even if we think in narrative terms, it is by no means good (or bad, for that matter) to act within this narrative structure. Strawson's examples for this idea are the Stoics and Sartre's character Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of *La Nausea*.
- iii. PNT is false, ENT is true. In this instance, we are not narrative in our thinking, however, we *should* be. The narrative in this instance becomes an ideal that we need to strive for because it guides our ethical actions. The model view upon which this value relation is based is Plutarchian moralism.¹⁶
- iv. Both PNT and ENT are false. This position encompasses the view which Strawson endorses. If it is true, then not all people think in narrativist terms, and we do not need a narrative in order to live a good life.

Considering the first three combinations, Strawson is arguing for a fourth combination which necessarily means rejecting the first one. My

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Galen Strawson, "Narrativity and Non-Narrativity," *WIREs Cognitive Science* 1, no. 6 (2010): 775.

¹⁶ Plutarch is the philosopher who developed a notion of the narrative technique, a way in which we train our ethical assessment using first-person references, apostrophes, utterances, comments, references, etc. See Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives – Narrative Technique and Moral Judgment* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

reading of Strawson emphasizes less the episodic *self*/ethics and more an attack on the position which states that the PNT is an objective mental state of every healthy individual and that ENT is necessary for us to live moral lives. The episodic part of Strawson's theory is a byproduct of his rejection of both PNT and ENT. This is not to say that some people are not narrative in their thinking, on the contrary, Strawson admits that many of us are, indeed, deeply narrative. But what it is important to stress is the fact that some of us are not. We gain the intuition for this once we start reading the way he writes about this subject. He addresses both narrative individuals and episodic individuals on the basis of the thought process, pointing to the fact that we are all biologically different. In his book, *The Subject of Experience*, Strawson states that:

To be Narrative, as I will use the term, is to have a certain psychological characteristic. It is in the first instance a natural disposition, even if it's open to cultivation. Narrativity, or the lack of it, is a natural dimension of human psychological difference, whatever the possible effects of training or cultural influence.¹⁷

This fact is deeply rooted in Strawson's metaphysics of *the self*.¹⁸ There is a differentiation in what we are and what *I* am. We are all human beings, and that is true for all of us, however, the *I*, or *the self*, is something that deals with the inner subject of experience.¹⁹ Two things are derivable from this:

- i. *The self* is both biological and cultural.
- ii. Different people have different ways of experiencing *the self*, or better yet, the subject of their experience.

The first claim opens the door for discussing the premises upon which Strawson builds his theory while the second claim is probably the key claim Strawson uses to attack narrativity. Strawson is pretty much clear on this fact, noting that "the key claim is that human beings differ."²⁰ He takes into consideration that we have Daniel Dennett as one of the bearers of narrativity and Bob Dylan as the one of the bearers

¹⁷ Galen Strawson, *The Subject of Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106.

¹⁸ Whenever the concept of the *I* arises in Strawson's writing, I will use the concept of *the self* to have a coherent argumentative process since there is no clear difference between the *I* and *the self*.

¹⁹ Strawson, *The Subject*, 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

of episodicity. There is a whole discussion that concerns both claims unfolding later, after outlining Strawson's theoretical approach.

The important thing is for us to understand in which way Strawson defends this distinction. When we provide a theoretical outline, there is always a need for examples, and the examples that Strawson uses stem from dead writers²¹ (e.g., Henry James, Samuel Hanagid, etc.) and himself. His arguments for episodicity come from his perspective and the angle acquired by his reading of the aforementioned authors. The consequence of these examples is that some of us cannot comprehend what it is to be episodic apart from imagining this type of psychological configuration based on our experience. Strawson stresses this for himself when he reads the narrativist authors; they are, as he states, completely alien to him.²² What is meant to be shown by stressing Strawson's examples is this: if there is a subject X who perceives themselves as episodic, given the premise that most of us are narrative, is it relevant to their view for utmost consideration? At best, Strawson's view could be used to limit the scope of the narrativity thesis, but could it impact it in such a way as to make it obsolete? If we, for example, state that to lead a normal ethical life, one should have a specific set of characteristics one needs to fulfill. One could pose a question regarding the role of the psychopaths when reflecting on general ethics. Studies show that less than 1% of the world population are psychopaths.²³ Do they consider morality in the same way as non-psychopaths? The answer is, I believe, a clear no. Research suggests that psychopaths do not conform neither to the requirements set up by conceptual rationalism that is a part of moral philosophy, nor empirical rationalism that is a part of every-day life.²⁴ And it is important to emphasize that the moral understanding that originates from these requests is necessary for moral agency.²⁵ Should we reconfigure our view of ethics just so we could accommodate the people with psychopathic conditions? This is an important question and its answer has interesting implications. If the answer is 'yes,' one would have to broaden up their ethical theory in a way in which the moral requirements for an ethical act are

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 110.

²³ Robert D. Hare, "Predators: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us," *Psychology Today* 27, no. 1 (1994): 54-61.

²⁴ Shaun Nichols, "How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to Be Amoral?" *The Monist* 85, no. 2 (2002): 286.

²⁵ Gerrard Elfstrom, "The Theft: An Analysis of Moral Agency," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 28.

so general, that they would be detached from the moral richness that our moral lives entail. If the answer is ‘no,’ one would have to carry on talking about ethics without considering the ones that have the condition which does not enable them to fulfill the requirements of a reasonable ethical agent.

This consequence of a ‘yes’ is that we should reshape the theory of *the self* for it to encompass the episodics. This is what Strawson is after and the question which I would like to pose is this: is it justified? Strawson notices the consensus within the academic sphere that the narrative notion of *the self* is currently the most powerful account.²⁶ I would argue that it is rightfully so, noting the power it has brought to the spheres of philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience with regard to the way they were mentioned beforehand. Although challenging this account is a necessary move, I would argue that Strawson needs to be much more convincing in his hypothesis, on the basis of the evidence he provides for his claim, beyond the subjective experience of himself and several others. James Battersby notices the same problem with Strawson’s position, namely, he states that upon numerous readings of Strawson’s position, we begin to see that his position is not at all clear and not precisely defined.²⁷ The claims that Strawson makes, according to Battersby, are mostly supported by counterarguments against narrativity, rather than by arguments in favor of episodicity, and he never really shows the direct alternative to the relation between the narrativity and *the self*. To make matters even more complicated concerning the notion of episodicity, Strawson is not at all clear whether episodics can differ in their perception of their *self*. Paul John Eakin correctly notes that even if there is such a phenomenon as episodicity, Strawson assumes that all of the episodics share the same description as the example that he gives, which is himself.²⁸

We can also provide further criticism of Strawson’s claim in this instance. The critique focuses on the premise that *the self* is both biologically and culturally dependent. When talking about the biological condition of *the self*, we are talking about whether someone is born as naturally narrativist or episodic. If *the self* is both biologically and culturally dependent, one would be able to change one’s natural disposition of perceiving oneself through social means. Consider that we have a person X and a person Y. X is deeply narrative while Y is deeply

²⁶ Strawson, *The Subject*, 107.

²⁷ James L. Battersby, “Narrativity, Self and Self-Representation,” *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 28.

²⁸ Paul John Eakin, “Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan,” *Narrative* 14, no. 2. (2006): 184.

episodic by nature. How could we change X to be episodic and Y to be narrativist? Taking into consideration the assumption that there is such a thing as a social narrative, we would need to decipher that narrative and, by deciphering that narrative, find ourselves within the social context. Our actions need to be intelligible within that context; we learn the norms and the rules which govern the morality of our actions. If our actions need to be intelligible within this context, we must find ourselves as actors within that context. That necessarily entails the narrative constitution of *the self*. While it is true that some authors consider that intrinsic to our constitution of *the self* is not the social context, but rather our interaction with the framework within that narrative,²⁹ this premise still stands. In this case, the social narrative is also an amalgam of interactions bound by the constraints of a specific community in a specific tradition that holds certain values and beliefs. The episodic *self*, in order to be an agent whose actions are intelligible, needs to constitute him/herself as a narrative agent to be able to answer the various requests that the social context imposes on his/her moral life. Hence, the subject Y can become a narrativist to orient themselves within the social world which is contextual. As Blagojević argues, the narrativist account (Schechtman's account) is much more heterogeneous and can answer various conflicts that can arise within *the self* and the context, whereas Strawson's view is quite impersonal.³⁰

This raises another question, namely in which instance could a subject X become episodic? I propose that there are two instances in which someone can become episodic and argue against one of them. The first instance concerns traumatic experiences. Past trauma might influence us to disregard going back to the past and may have a direct influence on our future. To sustain a traumatic experience may lead an individual to a world that has no meaning, possibility, or progress for a goal-directed activity.³¹ In this instance, narrating one's own life becomes harmful and we begin to experience ourselves as episodic.

Secondly, the case of ideology arises. The fact that Strawson's person is modeled under the notion of episodicity is criticized as be-

²⁹ David Menčík, "Identity Theft: A Thought Experiment on the Fragility of Identity," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 81.

³⁰ Bojan Blagojević, "The Narratosceptic's Argument – The Schechtman-Strawson Debate Revisited," in *Od narativa do narativnosti*, eds. Snežana Milosavljević Milić, Jelena V. Jovanović, and Mirjana Bojanić Ćirković, 195-204 (Niš: Filozofski Fakultet Univerziteta, 2018), 203.

³¹ Matthew Ratcliffe, Mark Ruddell, and Benedict Smith, "What is a 'Sense of Foreshortened Future?' A Phenomenological Study of Trauma, Trust, and Time," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014): 7.

ing a perfect fit for the neoliberal capitalistic society.³² If a person is detached from the past and the future and if only the present matters, the consumerist way of life seems like the perfect fit for that kind of individual. Therefore, the episodic *self* is ideological rather than phenomenological.³³ Tracing back to our main issue, we can claim that person X can become episodic by being influenced by the neoliberal consumerist ideology. This would be a second instance in which the narrativist can become episodic.

In this instance, I would like to provide a twofold criticism. Firstly, I would like to address the second way in which a narrativist can become episodic. To be able to hold an ideology is to take a political stance. According to Michael Freeden, ideology is constituted and formed by the distinctive clusters of political concepts.³⁴ Based on the premise of the narrativity thesis, we derive the meaning of these concepts from a contextual way of life and political ideology is shaped within one social narrative. This is also argued by Raul Lejano and Shondel Nero who find that ideologies are formed from social narratives.³⁵ To be able to understand a social narrative is to be able to think within the notions that it offers and to act in an intelligible way. The neoliberal capitalist ideology is still an ideology to be held by an individual and, therefore, the individual becomes a bearer of the narrative, which, by extension, makes the individual a narrativist. However, if an individual does not hold an ideology and merely goes through, what Mark Fisher would call “depressive hedonia,”³⁶ a state in which someone consumes the products to feel pleasure without feeling pleasure, then this individual can still be episodic. But that begs the question, if episodicity can be either a post-traumatic psychological condition or, rather an apolitical passivity, is it truly reasonable to consider it? Reminiscing on the example of psychopaths and ethics, the answer to this question would be a *no*.

The discussion that has been explored led us to, firstly, deduce that PNT still has the upper hand in terms of being the more reasonable position to hold. Even if Strawson has pointed out some weaknesses with

³² Bojan Blagojević, “‘We Have No Future:’ Teaching Philosophy to Narratosceptic Students,” *Godišnjak za Pedagogiju* 5, no. 2 (2020): 81.

³³ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁴ Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 48.

³⁵ Raul P. Lejano and Shondel J. Nero, *The Power of Narrative: Climate Skepticism and the Deconstruction of Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 23.

³⁶ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), 22.

the PNT, he never provided any valid alternatives. Secondly, we can think of PNT as an arbitrary psychological condition towards which individuals should strive in order to be active participants in society. When stating that a social narrative provides with values and beliefs the individuals being formed within that narrative, we are arguing that the contextual ethical framework is a constituting factor of one society.³⁷ Babalola Joseph Balogun states that one of the communitarian premises is that the spirit of the community is exhibited in values and goals that the society provides and that they are an integral part of the identity of those who live in that community.³⁸ Following that, a society has certain moral obligations towards an agent that is a part of it and those obligations are an inherent part of his/her identity. Finally, the aforementioned values, beliefs, and goals render intelligible the actions of the agents participating in the social system of one community. If that is the case, then ENT should also be true. This is, of course, a big leap in the argument, and ENT still needs to be argued for. However, the goal of this paper was to tackle Strawson's critique and present reasons why PNT or, better yet, the narrative theory of *the self* is a more valid position to hold. Consequently, the narrative theory of *the self* is necessary in order to make moral and political deliberations and understand oneself within a social framework, and, throughout this discussion, we have caught glimpses of why that is believed to be the case.

IV. Concluding remarks

The stage is set to conclude this paper which engages in an assessment and critique of Strawson's narratosceptic theory of *the self*. First and foremost, we have provided an overview of Strawson's theoretical basis, in which he argues that episodics do coexist alongside dichronics. Strawson challenges the idea that all individuals are narrative in their self-constitution, proposing instead that certain people perceive themselves as episodic subjects detached from continuous narratives. Nevertheless, this paper questions Strawson's narratosceptic theory by presenting certain challenges to it. One important critique focuses on Strawson's lack of empirical evidence as far as the notion of an episodic *self* is concerned. His focus is primarily on his own experiences and the experiences of literary characters and writers/artists who are no

³⁷ Social narrativity thesis, ultimately, is generally taken to be a notion derived from the frameworks of the most important communitarian philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor.

³⁸ Babalola Joseph Balogun, "How Not to Understand Community: A Critical Engagement with R. Bellah," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 67.

longer alive. This raises the question of the generalizability of his conclusions to a wider range of people. Secondly, this paper also argues that episodicity can be a result of traumatic experiences or ideological factors. The argument that this paper establishes is based on Strawson's premises in his metaphysics of *the self*. If his premises are correct, then it is important to examine whether *the self* can shift from being diachronic to episodic and vice-versa. After tackling the multiple ways in which a diachronic *self* can become episodic, we ascertain that the result is rather vague. On the one hand, even if a person who has a diachronic constitution of *the self* can become episodic, those examples, as stated, are an effect of trauma. On the other hand, the second way in which a *self* can shift from being diachronic to being episodic could be a result of an ideological framework in which a person finds him/herself. After considering the multiple ways in which a diachronic *self* can become episodic, we can infer that episodicity is likely a result of a traumatic past and, thus, it is not viable to change the dominant theory of *the self* in order to accommodate episodicity. This paper concludes that, at most, Strawson's theory only limits PNT (psychological narrativity thesis) and does not provide a well-established alternative.

References

- Balogun, Babalola Joseph. "How Not to Understand Community: A Critical Engagement with R. Bellah." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 55-76.
- Battersby, James L. "Narrativity, Self and Self-Representation." *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 27-44.
- Blagojević, Bojan. "'We Have No Future:' Teaching Philosophy to Narratosceptic Students." *Godišnjak za Pedagogiju* 5, no. 2 (2020): 73-82.
- Blagojević, Bojan. "The Narratosceptic's Argument – The Schechtman-Strawson Debate Revisited." In *Od Narativa do Narativnosti*, edited by Snežana Milosavljević Milić, Jelena V. Jovanović, and Mirjana Bojanić Ćirković, 195-204. Niš: Filozofski Fakultet Univerziteta, 2018.
- Brockmeier, Jens, and Hanna Merentoja. "Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics." *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 1-27.
- Chrysanthou, Chrysanthos S. *Plutarch's Parallel Lives – Narrative Technique and Moral Judgement*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.

Dennett, Daniel. "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity." In *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, edited by Frank S. Kessel, Pamela M. Cole, and Dale L. Johnson, 105-115. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992.

Eakin, Paul John. "Narrative Identity and Narrative Imperialism: A Response to Galen Strawson and James Phelan." *Narrative* 14, no. 2 (2006): 180-187.

Elfstrom, Gerrard. "The Theft: An Analysis of Moral Agency." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 27-53.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books, 2010.

Freeden, Michael. *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Hare, Robert D. "Predators: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us." *Psychology Today* 27, no. 1 (1994): 54-61.

Lejano, Raul P., and Shondel J. Nero. *The Power of Narrative: Climate Skepticism and the Deconstruction of Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Menčík, David. "Identity Theft: A Thought Experiment on the Fragility of Identity." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 71-83.

Merentoja, Hanna. *The Ethics of Storytelling. Narrative Hermeneutics, History and the Possible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Nichols, Shaun. "How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to Be Amoral?" *The Monist* 85, no. 2 (2002): 285-303.

Ratcliffe, Matthew, Benedict Smith, and Mark Ruddell. "What is a 'Sense of Foreshortened Future?' A Phenomenological Study of Trauma, Trust and Time." *Frontiers of Psychology* 5 (2014): 1-11.

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

Rudd, Anthony. "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity-Reply to Lippitt." *Inquiry* 50, no. 5 (2007): 541-549.

Schechtman, Marya. "The Narrative Self." In *The Oxford Handbook of Self*, edited by Shaun Gallagher, 394-415. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Schechtman, Marya. *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns and the Unity of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 428-452.

Strawson, Galen. "Narrativity and Non-Narrativity." *WIREs Cognitive Science* 1, no. 6 (2010): 775-780.

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

