The Narrative Account of the Self: The Untold Story

Abstract

In this paper, I present a new version of the Narrative Account of the Self: The Mental Stream View (MSV). I begin by describing the standard formulations of the narrative account of the self and argue that these versions are subject to two serious objections. I then lay out the MSV and explain why this version can effectively respond to these objections. I conclude that the MSV is an innovative and plausible version of the narrative account of the self.

1. Introduction

We all have a story, but is that story what makes us who we are? Consider Sally. She is a twenty-seven-year-old physical therapy student who grew up in San Diego and is currently residing in San Francisco. Does the story of Sally's life in some sense determine who she is? The narrative account of the self suggests that it does.

There are two major problems with the literature on the narrative account of the self. First, many views have failed to identify if the accounts are primarily metaphysical or epistemological in nature. As a result, their candidate answers to the initial inquiries are difficult to sort out. Second, scholars have been utilizing an overly restrictive notion of what constitutes narrative. In this paper, I will develop a version of the narrative account of the self that centers on the metaphysical questions surrounding the nature of the self. Further, this version makes use of a broader notion of narrative. As a result, this new version of the narrative account overcomes several of the difficulties standard accounts face.

To begin, I define the narrative account of the self as a primarily metaphysical view of the self:

The Narrative Account of the Self: The self is constituted by a narrative.

By explicitly characterizing the account in these terms, it becomes clear that standard formulations of narrativism come with two additional commitments. The first is about the epistemic stance the organism takes toward the metaphysical status of the self. According to standard formulations, self-bearing organism must understand that the self is constituted by a narrative and utilize this understanding in decision making. I call this the Epistemic Requirement. The second is about what counts as narrative. Standard formulations hold that narrative is primarily linguistic (MacIntyre 1984; Schechtman 1996; Dennett 1991, 1992). I call this the Linguistic View of Narrative.

In this paper, I present an innovative approach to the narrative account of the self. The Mental Stream View (MSV) holds that narrative should be understood as either primarily phenomenological or as a hybrid between phenomenological and linguistically expressible experiences. In Section 2, I review the standard formulations of the narrative account of the self. I explain their general features and identify the two most damaging objections to these accounts. In Section 3, I present the Mental Stream View. After outlining the basic commitments, I explain how the MSV maps onto the narrative account of the self. By letting go of the standard novel model of narrative, and shifting to the movie and storyboard models, I argue that the MSV constitutes an innovate approach to the narrative account. Finally, I show that a significant strength of the MSV is that it can respond to the two major objections as discussed in Section 2.

2. Standard Views of The Narrative Account of the Self

Standard formulations[1] of the narrative account of the self feature what I call the Epistemic Requirement.

Epistemic Requirement: The organism understands its self as a narrative and uses that understanding in decision making.

Schechtman explicitly points to this requirement for her Narrative Self Constitution View (NSCV). She claims that selves are constituted through "understanding our lives as narrative in form and living accordingly" (2011, p. 398). Narrativists that make similar claims are MacIntyre (1984), Taylor (1989), and DeGrazia (2005). Although none of these scholars label this feature of their accounts in this way, the content of the Epistemic Requirement is central to all of the mentioned accounts. The reason none have identified this as a purely epistemic feature is because none of them systematically separate metaphysical features of the view from epistemological features. With this distinction in mind, the importance, and ultimately associated problems, with their central commitment to the epistemic requirement comes to light. On this picture, any organism that has a self has to understand the fact that this self is constituted by a narrative. Additionally, narrativists claim that for a being to have a self it must identify specifically with the main character of this narrative. This requires identifying with the same self for past, present, and future experiences. Further, the organism must make choices based on this understood role in the narrative. Thus, when an organism is faced

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[1] Dennett's account does not feature the Epistemic Requirement. Thus, critiques targeting the Epistemic Requirement do not undermine Dennett's flavor of the narrative account of the self.

with a decision about what action to take, the organism considers what implications each option has within the context of the narrative.

Another important feature of standard versions of the narrative accounts of the self is what I call the Linguistic View of Narrative:

Linguistic View of Narrative: Narrative is primarily linguistic.

While it is not the case that all standard formulations of narrativism, such as the NSCV, require that a subject linguistically express every element of their narrative, by and large there is a strong emphasis on linguistic expressibility.[2] Daniel Dennett is particularly clear on this in his account of the self as a center of narrative gravity (1992).[3] Dennett invites us to consider the case of Gilbert.

Gilbert is a storytelling robot whose primary objective is to write a passable novel. The robot undergoes a variety of different experiences. With each experience, the robot outputs one or more sentences. The robot has been programed such that his main goal is to make all of his material cohere. Thus, the robot cannot output a collection of random sentences, nor can it behave in a totally random manner. In the end, the robot has produced a coherent collection of sentences which recount the adventures of Gilbert the

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[2] Schechtman puts this point by claiming that a subject can have implicit narratives that are not explicitly stated. But she emphasizes that the subject must somehow still be aware of the narrative (1996, p. 114-119). DeGrazia states that these implicit narratives can always be made explicit if the subject is prompted to do so (2005, p. 81-82).

[3] It is important to note that in Chapter 13 of Consciousness Explained Dennett adds that the self is constituted by language as well as gestures and actions (1991, p. 417). However, he does not elaborate on the way in which gestures and actions play into his account. He does very explicitly emphasize words:

> Our human environment contains not just food and shelter, enemies to fight or flee, and conspecifics with whom to mate, but words, words, words. These words are potent elements of our environment that we readily incorporate, ingesting and extruding them, weaving them like spiderwebs into self protective strings of narrative (1991, p. 414)

While Dennett recognizes gestures and actions may play some role, linguistic expressibility is his emphasis.

storytelling robot. Although human beings are an organic version of Gilbert, Dennett claims we should think of humans the same way we think of Gilbert. This robot tells stories about a particular collection of physical elements in in the world and strives to make those stories hang together in a coherent way. So too, humans tell stories about a particular collection of physical elements, those that are associated with our body, while striving to make such information hang together in a coherent form. In the end, the only reality to the self ascribed to the collection of physical things is nothing over and above the collection of output sentences. From this we can see that whatever constitutes a narrative, on Dennett's account is capture by Gilbert's final output.

   If these sentences capture anything about the adventures of Gilbert the storytelling robot, they can only capture the features of the experiences that are linguistic. While Dennett is quite explicit in his commitment to the Linguistic View of Narrative, he is not alone in understanding narrative in these terms. While one of the major challenges for the narrative account of the self is pinning down precisely what counts as narrative (Schechtman 2011), most scholars have adopted a model based approach to answering this question.[4] Rather than give the necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as a narrative, these scholars have almost uniformly adopted novels as the main model.[5] The collection of sentences that Gilbert produces embodies this trend.

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[4] Schechtman states "The chief difficulties facing narrative theories revolve around making the idea that the self is narrative concrete—What, exactly, counts as a narrative int his context? Where do self-narratives reside, how explicitly must they be articulated, and to whom? Where do the phenomenological aspects of selfhood fit in?" (2011, p. 415).
[5] I have articulated this approach in terms of the Novel Model, but it is more often identified by connecting the kind of narrative that the narrative account of the self is interested in to literature. This becomes most obvious when we look at Strawson and Lamarque's objections to the narrative account of the self. Strawson claims that if the self is not sufficiently like literary narrative, then the claim that the self is constituted by a narrative is trivial

An interesting result of the commitment to the Linguistic View of Narrative and the reliance on the novel models is the omission of the phenomenological aspects of the self. Few, if any, of these accounts directly engage with this fundamental aspect of selfhood. Instead, they focus on aspects of the self which are best captured through language. This points to a major debate centered on the relationship between the phenomenological and linguistic. Although some scholars have argued that language can fully capture phenomenological experiences (McDowell 1994; Bermudez 2007; Toribio 2008), others have argued that phenomenological experiences are not fully capturable through language (Crane 1988; Peacocke 1992; Tye 2006; Heck 2000; Gunther 2001). If phenomenological experiences are not fully capturable through language, then this emphasis on language within the narrative account of the self is problematic. As we will see later, even if language can fully capture phenomenological experiences, we cannot rely exclusively on the Linguistic View of Narrative when evaluating the narrative that constitutes the self.

3. Objections to Standard Formulations of Narrativism

Two of the most serious objections to standard formulations of the narrative account of the self come from Galen Strawson (2004) and Dan Zahavi (2007). In this section, I will review these objections as well as look at potential responses from standard accounts.

(2004, p. 439). Lamarque critiques the narrative account of the self on the grounds that human life is very different than literature (2007, p. 119). Specifically, in literature there are distinct roles for author, character, and critic to play. In so far as they are trackable in human life, they are far from distinct. The reason both Strawson and Lamarque frame their critiques in terms of literature is because the proponents of the narrative account of the self are largely evaluating narrative in terms of the kind of narrative presented through artifacts like novels. Schechtman (2011) identifies both Lamarque and Strawson as major objections to the narrative account of the self, but since Lamarque is explicitly targeting literary narrative, I do not address his objection in this paper. Strawson's objection can be understood more broadly, thus I do address it here.

Strawson objects to narrativism by appealing to his own experience (2004). While Strawson appears to have a self, he denies both (a) that he understands his self as a narrative and (b) that he uses this understanding in any way. Thus, Strawson does not identify with the same self for past, present, and future experiences. Further, he does not make any choices with reference to such a narrative. Rather than understanding his self in terms of a single narrative, Strawson operates within short lived episodes. Although Strawson doesn't specify the length of a particular episode, his objection suggests that this kind of episodic living shows that the Epistemic Requirement doesn't track what is really needed in order for an organism to have a self. Since the Epistemic Requirement is a key feature of standard formulations[6] of the narrative account of the self, Strawson claims that we should reject such accounts.

It looks like standard narrativists have two major options to respond to Strawson. First, the standard narrativist could just deny that Strawson has a self. Since the Epistemic Requirement suggests that any organism that fails to understand its self as a narrative is not a candidate for bearing a self, and Strawson appears to be such an organism, Strawson is a non-self bearing organism.[7] While this is an option, it is not easy to accept. Strawson seems to live a fairly ordinary human life. There is no obvious reason to think that Strawson should be counted as importantly distinct from other organisms that we ordinarily take to have selves.

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[6] Again, Strawson's objection does nothing to Dennett's account since it does not feature the Epistemic Requirement.

[7] Another option for the standard narrativist is to claim that each of Strawson's episodes is sufficiently long to count as a self. This leaves Strawson with multiple selves each lasting however long each of the episodes lasts. Velleman's view is something along these lines (2006). Of course, in this situation we are left with the counter-intuitive result that a single organism has multiple selves. While this may be acceptable for some individuals who are diagnosed with unusual mental health situations, it seems quite difficult to accept that most organisms have multiple selves.

Alternatively, standard narrativists may just deny that Strawson is accurately reporting on his understanding of his self.[8] On this picture, Strawson does in fact meet the Epistemic Requirement, but his perception of his understanding has been compromised. Thus, he merely perceives himself to live episodically. In reality, he does understand his self as narrative. The plausibility of this response depends, in part, on how explicitly an organism must understand his or her self as a narrative in order to meet the Epistemic Requirement. If an organism can meet the requirement with an implicit understanding, and Strawson is merely misreporting on this implicit element of his understanding, the response is more plausible. However, if one can only meet the epistemic requirement with an explicit understanding of one's self as narrative, then this response is less plausible. Even if the Epistemic Requirement can be satisfied with an implicit understanding of one's self as narrative, denying that Strawson can accurately report on this is somewhat problematic. It still demands that Strawson is incapable of accurately reporting on his own beliefs. That may be acceptable for some implicit beliefs, but the self is one of the most important and basic elements of human life. It is difficult to believe that Strawson could be so inaccurate on such a fundamental aspect of his experience. This seems to require suggesting that Strawson is a kind of extraordinary case where, despite his ability to function just as well as ordinary folks, he is extremely misguided in some of his most basic beliefs about who Strawson is. Broadly, Strawson's objection puts pressure on the Epistemic Requirement.

Another major objection to standard formulations of the narrative account of the self comes from Dan Zahavi (2007). Zahavi points out that one of the interesting

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[8] Schechtman (2001, p. 409) articulates essentially this response.

features of narrative is that in order to tell a story, one must already be in possession of a first-person perspective. This first-person perspective is prior to the articulation of the narrative, thus, questions about the nature of the self are addressing this pre-narrative element. He identifies this pre-narrative element as the minimal self. This minimal self is "an integral part of the structure of phenomenal consciousness and must be regarded as a pre-linguistic presupposition for a narrative practice" (Zahavi 2007, p. 191). On Zahavi's account, we need to have a minimal self in order to account for the first-person givenness that is a prerequisite for storytelling. Without this minimal self, we lack the perspective needed in order to generate a story.

We can understand Zahavi's objection as having two distinct components. First, he critiques the narrative account of the self on the grounds that it assumes the very thing it claims to be explaining. The Narrative account, according to Zahavi, presupposes the existence of a minimal self while claiming to give an account of the self. Since you cannot coherently presuppose the thing that you are trying to explain, we should reject the narrative account of the self. Secondly, and perhaps a bit more broadly, Zahavi accuses the narrative account of the self as failing to adequately respect the phenomenological aspects of the self. He puts this claim in terms of first-person givenness; however, this is somewhat confusing given not all narrativists assert that the self is real.[9] If the self is unreal, it's a bit unclear what first-person refers to. We can more charitably understand this element of Zahavi's objection in terms of perspectivalness. Here Zahavi argues that the narrative account of the self fails to accommodate the need for a pre-linguistic perspective from which the narrative can be

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[9] Within standard narrativism Daniel Dennett (1992) is clear in denying the reality of the self, while scholars such as Schechtman (1996), and Velleman (2006) argue that the self is real.

articulated. It looks like the pre-linguistic perspective that Zahavi has in mind is a kind of phenomenological experience associated with the narrative composing organism. Thus, the second element of Zahavi's critique of the narrative account of the self is that it is incomplete because there is no space for phenomenology. This is deeply problematic for any account of the self since phenomenology is a critical component of selfhood.

One way to reject Zahavi's critique is to deny the reality of phenomenology. This is the move that Daniel Dennett makes in his heterophenomenology (1991). If phenomenology is not a real phenomenon in the world, but is merely something that a large quantity of organisms report as genuine, then our account of the self does not have to make space for phenomenology. In other words, Dennett can deny Zahavi's claim that there must be some pre-linguistic perspective in order to compose a narrative. If we do not need such a perspective, then the narrative account does not presuppose any kind of minimal self, and the narrative account does not need to make space for phenomenology. Just as we do not think Gilbert the storytelling robot needs phenomenological experiences in order to generate a story, human organisms do not need phenomenological experiences in order to generate narratives.

While denying phenomenology as real does alleviate the pressure of Zahavi's objection, it is not easy to accept. Phenomenological experience is a widely accepted as a genuine feature of reality. If the only plausible forms of the narrative account of the self requires a flat-out denial of phenomenology, the view is not very plausible. If we accept phenomenology as a genuine phenomenon, is the narrative account of the self doomed?

I argue that the narrative account of the self can accommodate both components of Zahavi's critique. The account need not presuppose any kind of self in order to explain what the self is, and the account can accommodate the phenomenological aspects of selfhood. However, I agree with Zahavi that standard formulations of narrativism to date have been unable to accommodate his critique. The reason these accounts have been unable to respond to Zahavi in a satisfying manner is largely because of their reliance on the Linguistic View of Narrative and the novel model. Through expanding our understanding of narrative to include models that do not emphasize language at the expense of phenomenology, the narrative account of the self can effectively respond to Zahavi's objection. In the next section, I show precisely how this can be done.

4 The Mental Stream View

The MSV is an innovative approach to the narrative account of the self. This approach asserts that narrative should be understood as either primarily phenomenological or as a hybrid between phenomenological and linguistically expressible experiences.[10] The MSV is inspired by views such as Timothy Bayne's virtual phenomenalism (2010), Evan Thompson's self as process (2015), and the Yogacara Buddhist understanding of the foundation consciousness (Waldron 2003; Ganeri 2012; Garfield 2015). However, the MSV is distinct from those account in two major ways. First, the MSV holds that the content of the mental stream is quite expansive. It includes

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[10] While the MSV is the first version of the narrative account of the self to be developed in this way, it is not the first attempt made at understanding narrative outside of purely linguistic terms. David Carr (1989), working in the philosophy of Time, defends a version of what constitutes narrative that is non-linguistic. While Carr and myself both put forward accounts that do not rely on language, we differ on our approach to understanding narrative. Carr attempts to directly define narrative in terms of beginning-middle-end structure, while the MSV and the majority of work done on the narrative account of the self relies on a model based approach to understanding narrative. See footnote 15 for more on the MSV and Carr.

all of an organism's collected phenomenological experiences. This is different than, for example, Thompson's view where the stream consists merely of an organism's habits and tendencies (2015). Second, the MSV is distinct because it is necessarily a version of the Narrative Account of the Self. None of the views that inspired the MSV make any claims about the narrative account of the self. In section 4.1, I explain what the MSV is committed to. In 4.2, I show that MSV is a version of the Narrative Account of the Self. In 4.3, I show that the MSV can respond to both Strawson and Zahavi's objections in a satisfactory manner. Thus, the MSV is a plausible alternative to standard formulations of the Narrative Account of the Self.

4.1 What is The Mental Stream View

Before we can get into the major commitments of the MSV, we need an important distinction: the self versus the organism. The human organism is the biological entity identified as homo sapien sapien. The self is something constructed by the organism. With this distinction in mind, we can turn to the Mental Stream View.

The Mental Stream View is committed to the following four characteristics:

1. Human organisms are sense-making creatures.
2. Each human organism has a mental stream. This mental stream is constituted by the perspectival phenomenological experiences collected by the organism.
3. The human organism makes sense of the mental stream by generating a three-part representation which represents the mental stream as belonging to a single enduring entity.

4. There is no reality to the single enduring entity outside of this organism generated representation.

Let's examine each of these commitments.

In general, living organisms try to make sense of their environment in order to survive. While human organisms are not unique in their desire to make sense of their environment, they are uniquely good at doing so. Since human organisms lack some of the features that enable other kinds of organisms to survive, such as extreme speed or strength, one of the main ways such organisms manage to survive is through sense-making. Thanks to the peculiarities of human brains, such organisms are wired to make sense of both the external and internal environments. This ability is critical to the survival of human organisms.

Each human organism has the capacity to pre-reflectively collect phenomenological experiences. This is thanks to various features of these creatures such as sense organs. For example, the visual system allows the organism to pre-reflectively collect phenomenological experiences including the particular shape and color features in its environment. It is pre-reflective in the sense that the organism does not need to consciously direct its intellectual resources toward this task. The gathering of phenomenological experiences happens automatically, in a way that is similar to breathing and other automated biological activities. It is perspectival in the sense that it is gathered from the particular spatio location of the organism at the time of the experience. This perspective is encoded in the experience capturing activity. For example, when the organism interacts with a red ball, the organism gathers data about

this interaction from its particular spatial location at the time of interaction. This perspectival phenomenological data is stored in the creature's mental stream. The data within this mental stream is quite expansive since every time the organism undergoes any kind of experience, information is added to this mental stream. One important feature of the mental stream is that the phenomenological experiences stored within it are not in any particular structure. In other words, the information within the mental stream is a jumbled collection of various phenomenological experiences.

As sense making creatures, human organisms strive to make sense of this mental stream. In order to achieve this goal, the organism generates a representation.[11] The representation generation is a reflective activity. In other words, the organism must direct its intellectual resources toward generating the representation. The representation consists of three components: the mental stream, the belonging relationship, and a single enduring entity. Thus, the organism makes sense of the mental stream as a collection of perspectival phenomenological experiences that belongs to a single enduring entity. Let's take a closer look at both the mental stream component and the single enduring entity component of this representation.

While the mental stream itself is a jumbled collection of phenomenological experiences, the mental stream component of the three-part representation is not a jumbled mess. Instead it is a curated subset of the mental stream content. The curation process is subject to many variables including, but not limited to, the intellectual

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[11] As to how the organism generates this representation, a Yogacara Buddhist inspired solution is a mechanism identified as the pre-attentive mind. Both Gaeneri (2012) and Thompson (2015) discuss how this mechanism functions, but the existence of such a mechanism is controversial. Thus, I do not focus on precisely how this occurs.

capabilities of the organism, the organism's accuracy in reflecting on their mental stream, and the specific preferences of the organism in fulfillment of their sense-making goals.[12]

Here it is important to note that the single enduring entity is quite simple. If this component of the representation were complex, then the representation as a whole would fail to serve its purpose. A complex single enduring entity component would demand extensive resources on behalf of the organism to represent effectively. The organism already has quite an extensive task in creating the mental stream component of the three-part representation. This component demands that the organism take a curated selection of the jumbled collection of phenomenological experiences within the mental stream and represent them. If simultaneously the organism has to engage in the demanding task of representing another complex entity, then this would undermine the organism's primary objective: make sense of the mental stream. In order to fulfill its sense making goals, the organism must represent the single enduring entity as something simple. In its strongest form, we might think of this single enduring entity as a metaphysical simple – i.e. something that has no parts. I will not here argue that the organism must represent the single enduring entity as a metaphysical simple, but it must minimally represent something relatively simple. Too complex, and the entire representation fails to fulfill its ultimate purpose: to help make sense of the mental stream. [13]

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[12] For example, if the organism is an infant this curation process will look very different than a 32 year old woman since their intellectual capabilities are quite different.

[13] It is for this reason that I am extremely skeptical that the single enduring entity component of the three part representation could be identical to the human organism. While it is natural to think that a represented self with the same properties possessed by the organism means that the organism is a self, I think that the organism as a

Finally, the single enduring entity which the organism authors via the creation of this representation does not exist outside of this representation. In other words, the single enduring entity does not refer to any feature of reality beyond this representation.[14] The single enduring entity within the organism generated representation is incredibly useful. As a result of its utility and explanatory power, many organisms fail to realize that the single enduring entity exists only within the confines of the organism generated representation. Because the organism authors the representation, so too the organism authors the single enduring entity. As a result, this single enduring entity is a kind of fictional self. It exists in the same sense that Mickey Mouse exists. There is a genuine fictional character that Walt Disney created on the train back from a failed business meeting in New York. But, if we try to find what "Mickey Mouse" really refers to, we cannot find any candidates outside of the fictional world Walt Disney generated. So too, we cannot find any candidate referent of the organism's single enduring entity. It exists purely as an element of an organism generated representation.

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whole is much too complex to be identical to the single enduring entity component of the three part representation. I will not argue this point at length, but for such a view to work on the MSV, the organism must be represented in very simplistic terms in order to serve the intended goal of the three part representation: to make sense of the mental stream. If the organism must generate a representation of itself as the single enduring entity component with all of its various parts (like limbs, hair folicules, finger nails etc.), then the representation generation is so demanding that it is no useful in simply making sense of the mental stream.

[14] If it turns out that the single enduring entity is identical to the organism, then one might have a version of the MSV that did not include this fourth requirement. I've expressed skepticism as to how this version might actually hold together, but it if one can argue for a sufficiently simple single enduring entity component that is identical with the organism, then the single enduring entity might exist outside of the representation. I leave that open as a possibility. Without further argumentation for how such a version might go, I maintain that MSV is characterized by all four commitments. With further successful argumentation, there may be space for a weaker version of MSV that lacks the fourth commitment.

4.2 The Mental Stream View and Narrative

The MSV is an innovative version of the narrative account of the self. Although I have set aside many differences between the MSV and standard accounts, such as issues centered on the reality of the self and agency, it is critical to look at the minimal requirements of the MSV versus standard accounts. By moving away from the Epistemic Requirement of standard formulations, the MSV allows us to identify what is required for an organism to have a self that is constituted by a narrative.

As mentioned earlier, most narrative accounts of the self are committed to the Linguistic View of Narrative and thus understand narrative through the model of a novel.[15] Here a narrative is a collection of linguistically expressible sentences which hang together such that all of the material coheres. If we rely exclusively on the novel model of narrative, then the three-part representation identified as the self in the MSV does not constitute a narrative. When the organism generates the three-part representation, the mental stream component is a representation of a curated selection of content from the organisms' mental stream. Recall that the mental stream is constituted by a jumbled collection of perspectival phenomenological experiences. Such a collection appears to be radically different than a collection of sentences. If

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[15] Although most scholars working on the self do not engage in what constitutes narrative, philosophers working in areas such as the philosophy of Literature and the philosophy of History have taken up this question. For example, David Carr (1986) suggests that narrative is constituted by a beginning-middle-end structure. An alternative proposal is that all that is required for something to constitute a narrative is that it be presented as something framed. For the MSV, the structure account of narrative does not map easily onto the mental stream given it is a jumbled collection of phenomenological experiences. However, when the organism generates the mental stream component of the three part representation, the organism does in fact frame the curated selection of elements from the mental stream. So, at least on first pass, the MSV is most compatible with the more minimal claim that in order for something to be a narrative, it has to be presented as something framed. This issue, however, is tangential to this paper since here I engage with versions of the narrative account of the self that are utilizing a model based approach to what constitutes narrative, rather than identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for narrative.

phenomenological experiences can be fully captured by language, the organism would have to engage in an extensive conversion activity in order to render the mental stream component of the three-part representation such that it maps onto the novel model of narrative. If phenomenological experiences cannot be fully captured by language, then the organism could not translate the mental stream component of the three-part representation into a candidate collection for the novel model. If the only way we understand narrative is through the novel model, then the MSV is not a version of the narrative account of the self.

Why think that the novel model is the only viable model for understanding what counts as narrative? As a result of the general consensus of novels as the preferred model, there has been little direct defense of narrative theorists' reliance on this model.[16] I argue that there are important alternative models to consider. They are significant because they show how the novel model emphasizes language at the cost of phenomenological experiences. If we can understand narrative through these alternative models, then the MSV is a version of the narrative account of the self.

4.2.1 Movie Model

Let's begin with movies as a model of narrative. For simplicity, we will turn to some of the early years of cinema and focus on silent movies. *The General* is a bit unusual for comedy films during the silent era. This film made "the difficult transition from comedy to feature film form by organizing itself around a situation rather than a series of gags" (Dixon 2011, p. 78). Buster Keaton, playing Johnny the Southern train engineer, loves both his train called "The General" and his lady, Annabelle. Denied

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[16] Currie points out that "film has not yet had the attention it deserves" (2010, p. 167).

admission into the Confederate army at the break out of the American Civil War due to his value as a civilian train operator, Johnny appears weak and unworthy of Annabelle's love. In an odd turn of events, Northern agents end up hijacking The General along with Annabelle as an unsuspecting passenger. Thus Johhny "must pursue them to win the girl and the war" (Dixon 2011, p. 78). According to Dixon, this film "is a perfectly balanced narrative trajectory" (2011, p. 80).

The General is a particularly good example of the problem with understanding narrative through the model of a novel. In the film, very few frames include any linguistic expression at all. Even without dialog or explanation, the film brings to life a strong and entertaining story. If we think that narratives is primarily linguistic, then we are in the awkward position of claiming that *The General*, and broadly all silent films, might fail to count as narrative.[17] Alternatively, we might have to claim that they only count as narrative if the audience goes through a laborious conversion process where every element of the piece is morphed into something linguistic. This is quite problematic given silent films, in particular, and movies in general, are ordinarily thought to be narratives.

What is different about the novel model of narrative and the movie model of narrative? While there are many differences between the two, one of the major differences is the way in which stimuli are presented to the audience. The main stimuli

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[17] The Film Language Hypothesis is roughly that each frame in a film is small word-like unit. Films become meaningful via arranging these word-like units in a kind of film syntax. Noel Carroll argues quite convincingly that this hypothesis is false (2008). If the Film Language Hypothesis is true, then the standard narrativists may be able to argue that the movie model and novel model are not sufficiently distinct to render reliance on the novel model as problematic; however, this hypothesis has been decreasing in popularity steadily since the late 20th century. Proponents of the hypothesis include Spottiswode (1935), Henderson (1980), and John Carrol (1980), Wilson (2006). Opponents to the hypothesis include Harma (1977) and George Currie (1993).

that an audience of a novel is offered consists of words on a page. Whatever other phenomenological experiences the audience of a novel undergo are largely due to the intellectual activities of that audience. For readers who are less engaged, the only phenomenological experiences involved may be seeing ink on a page. Movies, on the other hand, present a wide array of different stimuli designed to generates specific phenomenological experiences for the audience. By design, movies communicate the story through a curated collection of stimuli organized specifically to generate phenomenological experiences. Thus, movies as a model of narrative makes space for phenomenological experiences to be a critical component of narrative.

4.2.2 Storyboard Model

Now we turn to today's "worldwide standard procedure for the production of both animation and live-action films and videos" (Canemaker 1999, p. ix). This standard procedure is the creation of a storyboard. A storyboard is

> the premiere preproduction, pre-visualization tool designed to give a frame-by-frame, shot-by-shot series of sequential drawings adapted from the shooting script. They are concept drawings that illuminate and augment the script narrative and enable the entire production team to organize all the complicated action required by the script before the actual filming is done (Hart 2008, p. 1)

Originally invented at the Disney studio, and in full use around 1933, this critical storytelling device is reminiscent of a comic book (Canemaker 1999, p. 5). The storyboard consists of a series of frames. Within each frame the creative team identifies

key objects, critical motion, and the focus of the scene. The generation of a storyboard is a dynamic process:

> 'Each time we look at a pass,' explains Johnson, "we can take things out" or embellish other ideas. 'That's what makes this process so exciting,' comments director Allers. 'People are always trying to find ways of improving the material. The story artist's contribution will influence what the script is, the writer will go back and write according to the ideas that the story artist came up with' (Canemaker 1999, p. 1)

Storyboards allow the filmmaking team to engage in "organizing narrative elements sequentially; drafting drawings that communicate clearly and immediately" and the men and women who generate the frame by frame drawings are "part of a storytelling process integral to the making of animated cartoons" (Canemaker 1999, p. 3).

One of the most interesting things about storyboards is how effectively a narrative is communicated without any linguistic explanation. Unlike most comic strips, storyboards manage to tell the narrative without relying on any words. Since "the storyboard artist's job is to give cohesion, interpretation and illustration to the visual spine, the 'flux of imagery' that will constitute the screenplay" (Hart 2008, p.5), one can effectively follow the story without any language-based explanation. The images themselves show the audience exactly how the story is progressing.[18]

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[18] One can imagine someone pushing a parallel position to the Film Language Hypothesis- the Storyboard Language Hypothesis. On this account, even though there is little to no explicit reliance on language within storyboards, the

If we understand narrative through either the movie model or storyboard model, then the MSV is a form of the narrative account of the self. The organism's mental stream is constituted by the jumbled collection of perspectival phenomenological experiences pre-reflectively collected by the organism. When the organism reflectively generates the three-part representation, the organism engages in creating a curated subset of these perspectival phenomenological experiences captured by the mental stream component of the representation. The organism's self arises as a direct result of the three-part representation being generated such that the mental stream belongs to a single enduring entity. Thus, the organism generated self is constituted by a narrative. Through the movie model, we see how perspectival phenomenological experiences, along with linguistically expressible events, can both significantly contribute to the creation of a narrative. Through the storyboard model, we see how perspectival phenomenological experiences alone can successfully constitute a narrative. If one insists that novels are the only way to understand what constitutes narrative, then one must explain how both movies and storyboards communicate stories. In its most extreme form, the Novel Model Enthusiast must either deny that movies like *The General* and storyboards actually constitute narratives or they must claim that there is no relevant difference between novels and these alternative models. I have given reason to think that these models are importantly distinct and ultimately highlight the phenomenological aspects of narrative that novels simply do not effectively capture.

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framing of the images still has a grammatical or linguistic structure. I suspect that we can reject the Storyboard Language Hypothesis for much the same reason we rejected the Film Language Hypothesis.

4.3 Objections

In section 3, we reviewed two major objections to standard formulations of the narrative account of the self: Galen Strawson's claim to live episodically, and Dan Zahavi's claims that the account assumes the existence of the self and it lacks space for the phenomenological aspects of the self. So far I have sketched the MSV and argued that it is a version of the narrative account of the self. In this section, I will show that the MSV is more plausible than standard formulations of the narrative account of the self because it is not subject to either Strawson's or Zahavi's objections.

The MSV has two features that allow it to effectively respond to Strawson's objection. First, the MSV systematically separates the human organism from the self. The self is a fictional object created by the organism. We can separate the self from the organism, just as we can separate a fictional character from its author. When Strawson claims to live episodically we have a human organism reporting on its beliefs about the metaphysical status of the self. This is a not a self reporting on its own metaphysical status, but rather an organism reporting its beliefs about something it created. While we might think that the creator of the self has some special insight into what it created, this certainly doesn't have to be the case. The organism might believe that the self it created is made up of fluffy bunnies, but this doesn't make it true. Strawson is an example of an organism that has formulated a belief about its created self: that this self is episodic in nature. According to the MSV, the self is a narrative because of the contents of the mental stream component of the three-part representation the organism creates. This holds true independently of whatever beliefs the organism has about the fictional object. Secondly, the MSV does not feature the Epistemic Requirement. According to standard narrativists, the organism must understand its self as a narrative and use that

understanding in decision making. But on the MSV, the organism may hold whatever beliefs it so chooses about the status of the self. These beliefs do not challenge the metaphysical status of the self.

Dan Zahavi's critique of the narrative account of the self has two distinct components. First, he argues that the account assumes the very thing that it is claiming to explain. Second, he argues that this account fails to adequately respect the critical phenomenological aspects of the self. The MSV does not assume the very thing that it is claiming to explain. The MSV begins by asserting that there are such biological entities as human organisms. These organisms are assumed to be real, or at least as real as other biological organisms. From there, the account goes on to explain how this organism goes from a pre-reflective jumbled collection of phenomenological experiences (the mental stream), to the arising of a fictional object known as the self. The self does not enter in any way into the picture on the MSV until this organism reflectively generates a three-part representation. Prior to the generation of the complete three-part representation, the organism is a non-self bearing organism. The reason the MSV can elegantly respond to this element of Zahavi's critique is largely because the account systematically separates self talk from organism talk. This distinction keeps us from inappropriately appealing to the self in our explanation of what the self is constituted by.

The MSV is a version of the narrative account of the self that successfully accommodates the critical phenomenological aspects of the self. Unlike standard formulations of the narrative account of the self that rely on the Linguistic View of Narrative and the novel model, the MSV is committed to neither of these. The mental stream component of the three-part representation is a narrative if we understand narrative through the movie model or storyboard model of narrative. Both of these

models are importantly distinct from the novel model because they make space for the phenomenological aspects of narrative. If narrative can only be understood through the novel model, then the MSV is not a version of the narrative account of the self, and perhaps the narrative account of the self cannot accommodate the phenomenological aspects of the self. However, I have argued that we should understand narrative through the movie and storyboard models. Thus, the MSV is an approach to the narrative account of the self, and as such it can accommodate the phenomenological aspects of the self. And so, Zahavi's objection no longer stands.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that the MSV offers an innovative and plausible approach to the narrative account of the self. The MSV is innovative because it systematically separates organism talk from self talk, it does not feature the Epistemic Requirement, and in virtue of incorporating both movies and storyboards as alternative models of narrative, it makes space for the phenomenological aspects of the self. It is a plausible approach because the MSV can elegantly respond to two of the most damaging objections to the narrative account of the self. My aim here was not to argue that the narrative account of the self is preferable over other views of the self. Instead, I have assumed that the narrative account of the self is a viable explanation of the nature of the self. I have shown that the MSV is a new version of the account that has strategic advantages. Thus, I have argued that the MSV is preferable direction to go for those inclined to pursue the narrative account of the self.

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