Narrative and Personal Identity

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In this paper I explore how and why personal identity might be essentially narrative in nature. My topic is the question of personal identity in the strict sense of identity—the question of which person you are, and how that person is extended in space, time, and quality. In this my question appears to contrast with the question of personal identity in the sense sought by teenagers and sufferers of mid-life crises who are trying to 'find themselves'. But in fact it will be key to my argument that these questions are not distinct and independent. Whereas Parfit was concerned, in his work on personal identity, with how he was extended over time, the teenager who is finding themselves is concerned with how they are extended in *quality*. Indeed, the core of my argument is that because narrative is the key to understanding how we are extended in quality, and quality is just one more dimension along which we are extended, along with space and time, narrative must also be the clue as to how we are extended in space and time. You, I will argue, are the protagonist in the best story of your life.

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This is how I will proceed. I begin, in §I, by explaining what I take the central connection to be between the nature of persons and the question of personal identity over time. Then in §II, I argue that in addition to being extended in time and space, we are also extended in quality. In §III, I explain the grounds on which I have argued, in previous work, that our extension along the dimension of quality is narrative in nature. I then recap, in §IV, what I think are the best objections to any role for narrative in the correct answer to this question, and argue that what these objections really show is that there is no role for a *narrator* in its correct answer. But we can make sense of how there is a role for narrative but no role for a narrator in the same way in which we make room for interpretation without making room for an interpreter in our accounts of other kinds of interpretive objects, including texts, thought, and language more generally—by appeal to the *best* narrative interpretation. Finally, in §V, I distinguish between two ways of implementing the idea that you are the protagonist in the best story of your life, corresponding to two different ways of determining what makes something part of your life. And I briefly suggest that the more unified and ambitious of these two answers holds the seeds of an answer to many of the most forceful puzzles about the conditions of personal identity over time.

I

Personal Identity. I said above that I am interested in the question of personal identity. But as is usually the case in philosophy, talk about identity can be dispensed with. What I am really interested in is who and what you are. Since you are a person, and I am interested in who and what you are, it follows that I am interested in who and what is identical to a person—where that person is you. Indeed, that is all that anyone who is interested in personal identity is ever interested in; using the tool of identity to frame this question is helpful just in so far as it makes it easier to ask some parts of this question more precisely, without presupposing any particular answer to who and what you are, and who and what you are not.

Answering the question of who and what you are must also tell me *when*, *where*, and *how* you are. If I know who you are, then I should be able to figure out that you are not Napoleon Buonaparte, because he was then, and you are now. If I know what you are, I

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should be able to figure out that you are not at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, because no one at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean is reading a philosophy paper, and you are reading this one. And if I know who and what you are, then I should be able to figure out that despite that tone in your voice, you are not really upset at me, because that is just the tone that creeps into your voice when you are tired. So it is no wonder that philosophical accounts of personal identity have often focused, at least since the early Buddhists, on specific puzzles that arise about the persistence conditions of persons over time. These questions are questions about when you are, and so of course they must be swept up by any adequate answer to who and what you are.

Of course, as a philosopher, I am also interested, not only in you in particular, but in the same question that can be asked about anyone else. To know who and what you are *in particular*, I must first know what *kind* of thing you are. So since you are a person, what I must know is what kind of thing persons are. Once I know what kind of thing persons are, I will be able to find when and where persons are, and so the only remaining task, in order to determine who *you* are, in particular, is to determine *which* among them is you. Hence, although I will continue to frame my question in this paper as a question about you, I am going to focus on the more general question of what *kind* of thing you are—on what kind of thing *persons* are.

Finally—and this is the last of my prefatory remarks—persons are not just any kind of thing. They are a special kind of thing. Indeed, persons are so special, among things, that to talk about what you are, instead of about who you are, is already to diminish you. Whether or not you are a what, you—precisely because you are a person—are a special kind of what. You are a who. So the question of what kind of thing persons are is just the question of how and why *whos* emerge out of the chaos of *whats*. An answer to what persons are that did not explain why persons are *whos* would be at best incomplete.

Having explained what I am looking for in abstract terms, let us now turn toward an illustrative example of a philosophical theory that aims to answer these questions—that tries to tell us where and when you are *by* offering a more comprehensive answer to *what* you are. And here I think Locke's account of the self is particularly instructive.

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Even though Locke does not describe his theory as an account of personal identity in modern terms, he does aim to give an account of the *self*. But since you are your self, Locke's account of your self is correct only if it succeeds as an account of who and what you are. So I understand Locke's theory to be an attempt to answer the same question I am asking. At any rate, I'll now describe the account that I take, rightly or wrongly, to be approximately Locke's, and explain why it does everything that I want from an account of personal identity, in roughly the kind of way that I think it should be done, even though it does not, as I will argue, do it correctly.

Now, from a contemporary perspective it is easy to read Locke (1689) through the lens of Parfit's (1971) or Lewis's (1976) framing of the question of persistence over time. But although we can extract an account of the conditions of the persistence of persons over time, Locke's account is grounded in a deep and general answer as to what makes *whos* different from *whats*. His answer is that *whos* are made up out of (self)-conscious experiences. Of course, not everything made out of conscious experiences is a who. Your conscious experience of reading this paper is not, for example, nor is the totality of all of your conscious experiences plus all of mine. Locke's answer to why neither of these things made up out of conscious experiences is a who is that a who must be a *maximally connected* sum of conscious experiences. In this, Locke's answer to what makes a who is like Lewis's answer to what makes a possible world. On Lewis's view, there is a lot of space and a lot of time. But only *maximally connected regions* of space and time are worlds. Similarly, on Locke's view the reason why your conscious experience of reading this paper is not a *who* is that it is not maximal, and the reason why the sum of your conscious experiences and mine is not a *who* is that it is not connected.

Locke's answer to what *kind* of thing you are, I believe, offers an explanatorily powerful, albeit false, answer to *why* you persist over time. It is that you are a person, and a person is a who, and a who is conscious, which means that they are a maximally connected sum of conscious experiences, and your conscious experiences are connected over time. It is true that in order to make this precise Locke must fill in a fuller story of what makes conscious experiences connected, and much excellent scholarship has been devoted to these important details of Locke's account. But the main point I want to extract from this discussion is that Locke's answer to how you are extended over

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time is not an arbitrary attempt at curve-fitting his prior intuitive judgements about when you are. It falls out of a much more powerful answer to what *kind* of thing you are—an answer that also has other consequences.

II

Space and Quality. Locke's theory of personal identity, I have suggested, has the right form. It tells us when you are *by* extracting this from a more general account of the kind of thing that you are. And Locke's account of the kind of thing you are has some promise to explain why whos are a special kind of thing—they, and only they, are *consciousnesses*—maximally connected conscious experiences. Now we may quibble, as many people have done, and as I would be happy to do on another occasion, about whether Locke's account yields the right answers about when you are. And we may also quibble about whether Locke's account explains why whos are special *enough*—in the end I think the answer to this too is 'no', and something of my thoughts about why will emerge later in this paper. But the more important thing for us right now is to see how Locke's account yields answers, not only to how you are extended in time, but also to how you are extended in *space*, and to how you are extended in *quality*.

Let us take space first. If persons are maximally connected consciousnesses, then we can deduce what Locke ought to say about science fiction cases involving fission, such as Parfit's half-brain transplant cases. When Derek goes into the operation and two different human bodies wake up afterwards, each with half of Derek's brain and all of his habits and memories, the conscious experiences in both of these bodies are connected to the conscious experiences in Derek's body before the operation in the same way that Derek's experiences before the operation were connected to one another. Hence they are connected to one another. So there are not two persons in these two different bodies, but actually just one. This gives us an answer to how Derek is spread out not just in time but in space—he is spread out between two bodies.

The same answer will go for fusion cases, of course. If Jake and Blake each suffer a horrible accident that renders their bodies

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unusable, and half of each brain is transplanted into the waiting halves of the skull of a new body, the person who wakes up has conscious experiences that are connected with Jake's and also connected with Blake's. But this of course make them connected with one another, and hence the experiences of the same person. So, since it is a contingent matter whether Jake and Blake will eventually undergo a fusion operation, it is a contingent matter, on this view, whether it turns out that there are two people or a single person located in two places. So, again, Locke's view is guiding us toward an answer to how you are located in space.

But even setting science fiction examples aside, Locke's view has something deep to tell us about where you are located in space. You are located where, and only where, your conscious experiences are located. If conscious experiences turn out not, strictly speaking, to be located in space, then you are not located in space either. If they turn out to be located in the cerebral cortex, then you are located in the cerebral cortex of your own brain. And if they turn out to be located in your sensory organs, then you are located in your sensory organs.

Let us assume for a moment that your conscious experiences are located in your cerebral cortex, simply for clarity of discussion. It follows that your hands are not part of you. It is true, of course, that they belong to you, and that they still belong to you in a relatively privileged sense. After all, they are the only hands that are part of your body, and your body is the only body that contains the particular cerebral cortex where your conscious experiences are located. This is like the way in which the *Mona Lisa*'s frame belongs to the *Mona Lisa*—it is the only frame in which the *Mona Lisa* is enframed. It is part of the experience of everyone who has viewed the *Mona Lisa* in person since it was put in that frame some decades ago, and in that sense its aesthetic qualities are important for the way in which people aesthetically engage with the *Mona Lisa*. But it is not part of the *Mona Lisa*—indeed, the *Mona Lisa* has appeared in different frames over the last few centuries, one of which was built by the man who went on to steal her in one of the most famous art heists of all time. Similarly, on Locke's view, your hands belong to you in a much more intimate sense than the air around you, but they still belong to you in a much *less* intimate sense than your conscious experiences do. Your hands belong to you by belonging to your

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body, and your conscious experiences belong to you by being *part* of you.

Once we see that Locke's account has such consequences for where you are, as well as when you are, we can also see that these consequences are not obviously true. It is not obviously true that your hand belongs to you only in a derivative sense—by belonging to your body. And this consequence of Locke's view does not go away, even if we change our view about the location of conscious experiences. Suppose, for example, that we say that a conscious experience is located throughout the sensory organ that is the source of that experience. Then we *will* say that part of you is located in your hands, since part of your sensory apparatus is in your hands. But we will still be forced to say that not *all* of your hands are part of you, and indeed that when you are not conscious of your hands, they are not part of you. Again, we will still say that they do belong to you in a relatively intimate sense, by belonging to your body. But they are not part of you—they are only part of your body.

The question of whether and in what sense your hand is yours, though we have broached it through the lens of what Locke's view tells us about how you are located in space, is also the very leading edge of a vast set of questions about how you are extended, not only along the dimensions of time and space, but also along the dimension of *quality*. Your hand is sweaty. So you are sweaty. Clearly, on Locke's view you count as sweaty not by being sweaty in the first instance—strictly speaking, connected sums of experience are not sweaty—but by being located in a body that is sweaty. You have not slept, but are running on adrenaline. You don't *feel* tired, but you *are* tired. Since you don't feel tired, you cannot, on Locke's view, count as tired in the first instance. You only count as tired because your body is tired. And you are kind and generous. But since there is no way that it consciously feels to be kind or generous, on Locke's view it is not true in the absolutely *strictest* sense that you are kind and generous. What is true instead is that you are located in a body or human organism that has the traits of being kind and generous.

Because Locke's account is an account of what kind of thing you are, it tells us, not just where and when you are, but also *how* you are. And by omission, it tells us how you are not. It implies answers to which qualities attach to you *directly*, and which attach to you only in the sense of attaching directly to things that are sufficiently

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directly associated with you. It offers us, as I will put it, an answer to how you are extended not just in space and time, but in *quality*.

Now, being sweaty, being tired and being kind are a heterogenous class. Most of us, most of the time, would be happy, I think, to say that sweating is not something that we do, but simply something that happens in or to our bodies. Locke is right, most of us would agree, that we are not sweaty in the first instance, but only sweaty because our bodies are. But in contrast, most of us also think that at least some of our character traits *do* belong to us in the first instance. It is *we* who are kind or generous, and not just the human organisms that we inhabit. If Locke is right, then we are wrong. Even our actions, on Locke's view, are not ours directly, for connected sums of conscious experiences cannot perform actions—they can only experience actions being performed.

The most important thing I want to say about Locke's view of persons is that the answer it offers us about how we are extended in the space of quality is *very coarse*. The only qualities that get to attach to us directly, are qualities of conscious experiences or combinations of conscious experiences. *All* such qualities attach to us directly, but *no* qualities of action, character or the body *ever* attach to us directly, under any circumstances.

An adequate answer to what persons are should do better, I think. It should not just expand Locke's account to include volitions and character traits, whether conscious or not, as well as conscious experiences—even if there were a way of doing this without undermining the naturalness of Locke's answer to what makes *whos* special. It needs to distinguish between which *among* the qualities of our conscious experiences, actions, character traits and body parts are ours in the first instance and which are merely the qualities of the human organism in which we are embodied.

III

The Narrative Self. Of course, there is a large and active area of philosophical research that is concerned specifically with the question of which of our *actions* are ours directly and which are merely the actions of the human organism in which we reside. And it turns out that this literature often engages with the question of which of our

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character traits are ours in the first instance and which are merely the traits of the way that we are embodied. This is the literature on *attributive responsibility*. The central question in the literature that has come to be known, following Gary Watson (1996), as the topic of *attributive responsibility*, is under what conditions someone is responsible for some action in the sense of it being truly theirs, or representing them. And the contributors to this literature typically take for granted that some actions, like the action of the willing addict described by Frankfurt (1971), are more truly owned by their agents than others—such as the similar action of Frankfurt's unwilling addict.

In my terms, this question is the question of which actions belong to you, and which belong to some other consequence of your environment and the way that you are embodied. All of the actions are yours in some sense, of course—if you take the drug because of your addictive desire, it is certainly not someone else who is taking it. But there is, I believe, a distinction that must be made among your actions, between those that directly belong to you and those that belong only to the body that you inhabit. And this distinction is no different in kind from the distinction that Locke rightly draws between the conscious experiences that belong to you directly and the sweat on your body, which belongs to you only indirectly. And it is similarly no different in kind from the distinction that we should draw, but Locke does not, between the conscious thoughts that belong to you directly and the intrusive thoughts of jumping over the balcony that are an alien presence within your conscious experience, even though they are part of it.

All of these, I claim, are distinctions between qualities that attach directly to you and qualities that attach only indirectly to you by attaching to your body. Because you are embodied, it can be hard to draw this distinction. But because you are not identical to your body, there must be some such distinction. Every view about what you are that does not identify you with your body will make it somehow, but every such view will make it in different ways.

So, as I've been noting, the literature on attributive responsibility can best be understood as an attempt to answer the special case of the question about how you are extended along the dimension of quality, restricted to the specific qualities of actions and character. I am going to suggest, in the end, that this is too narrow a lens, and that we should be thinking about all kinds of qualities at once. But it

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gives us an excellent place to look for answers. And Frankfurt's classic (1971) article 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' tells us in its very title that the right place to look for an answer to what makes some of your actions truly yours and some of them not is our philosophical understanding of the nature of *persons*. It is by understanding what a person is, Frankfurt contends, that we can learn where to look in your psychology for what makes some actions the actions of the person who you are and others only the actions of the body in which you reside. And this is a special case of exactly what I have been arguing so far in this paper.

So, like Locke's account, I believe that Frankfurt is starting with exactly the right strategy and looking for his answers in exactly the right kind of place. But the distinctive answer that Frankfurt actually gave, I believe, set us off in the wrong direction. According to Frankfurt's answer, a person is a creature whose actions are determined by its will. This gives us a natural answer to which actions are directly yours, because they are those that are determined by your will, and which are not, because they are those that are caused in some other way than by your will. But while I believe that in the very broadest strokes this is the right kind of answer, because it is grounded in an account of what persons are, at another still very high level of abstraction I believe that it set us off on the wrong path, of looking for what makes actions yours, by looking for the homunculus whose actions are your actions.

But unfortunately, I don't believe that there is any such homunculus whose choices are your choices. For every psychological distinction that we can draw, I believe that we can describe both cases in which the 'inner' side of this distinction misfires, because of the interference of the specific way in which it is embodied in particular external circumstances or inner biology, and also cases in which the outer side of the distinction makes you count as acting in a way that is truly yours, because of your distinctive luck in being propped up through the specific way in which you are embodied in ways that support your agency. Sometimes, to take famous examples from situational psychology, your bad luck to be part of an experiment in which you are late to deliver a lecture about good Samaritanism mitigates your ownership of your choice not to help the person along your path, but sometimes you get credit for being generous even though you would not have, if not for the luck of being part of an experiment that involves finding coins in vending machines.

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Similarly, sometimes the chemical effects of the drug that you are taking interfere with your agency, but sometimes they enable it. And sometimes the very same effect of the very same drug, or the very same feature of your external circumstances, both enables and disables you in different ways at the very same time.

It is a consequence, I think, of the way in which we are inextricably embodied and our bodies as biological organisms cannot be divided into the operation of discrete, unconnected systems that there can simply be no single answer to which kind of psychological processes are you and which are not. Only a holistic answer—one that draws on the full range of features of your life—can make the distinction we want to make between which qualities are yours directly and which are yours only indirectly. And that holistic answer, I have argued elsewhere, must be narrative in structure.

The reason why our account of who you are must be narrative in structure, I think, is ultimately simple. It is that you are a who in a sea of whats, and the concept of a who is a narrative concept, not a scientific concept. When we are asked to sift through all of your actions and answer which are truly yours and which belong instead to the effects of your biology or environment, what we are essentially asking is where the protagonist leaves off and their predicament picks up. The willing addict counts as acting in their own right because they are the protagonist in their story, whereas the unwilling addict counts as acting only in the sense that the body that they inhabit acts because the ultimate taking of the drug is part of the predicament in which this protagonist finds themselves—an obstacle that they are struggling but failing to get over.

But though Frankfurt describes his willing addict as acting in their own right and his unwilling addict as not, I also think we can elaborate on these stories in ways that change our sense of their narrative significance. Now imagine that the willing addict was until last week unwilling, and has only recently given in. And imagine that next week we all get together and stage an intervention as their friends. And suppose that this intervention goes on to be successful, and the now willing addict goes on eventually to live out their days sober and make a career out of helping others overcome addiction. Now, I think, in this version of the story, the correct answer is not that the willing addict's actions belonged to them in a way that the unwilling addict's did not. In this version of the story, the willing addict's

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problem was that the effects of their addiction were so insidious as to rob them, temporarily, of who they are.

And we can see that the narrative nature of persons can help to explain how not just actions but other qualities of bodies can be divided likewise between those that belong to the person directly and those that belong only to the way in which they are embodied. The athlete's reflexes may belong to her directly while the twinge in her hamstring does not, for example, and not because there is any intrinsic difference between reflexes and hamstrings, but just because this makes narrative sense of how she performs in her sport. The person with body dysmorphia may find themselves encumbered with the alien influences of a cervix and menstrual cycle, while the willing and eager mother of twelve exercises her agency in this way and is not misguided to feel mutilated by the hysterectomy that will save her life from cancer. This is again a difference between the narrative on which some organs and processes are obstacles to the protagonist and one on which they are the avenue through which the protagonist is active.

IV

Interpretivism. The idea that the self is narrative, for which I have been arguing, is far from original to me. I learned this idea from Marya Schechtman (1996) and David Velleman (especially the essays in Velleman 2005), and my understanding of it has been especially enhanced by Hilde Lindemann (2001, 2014) and through the incredible range of work in other fields adjacent to philosophy to which I was introduced by Schechtman. But I think that without care, this idea can easily either lead us in the wrong direction or, because we can see in advance that that direction is wrong, be dismissed too easily.

The problem is that narrative seems to require a narrator, and it is hard to see which narrator should count, or indeed why their narrative should count. A common form for narrative accounts of the self would have it that it is *first-personal* narratives that are important (as in, for example, Schechtman 1996). First-person narrative accounts accept what is probably the most natural answer to whose narrative should count for who you are—yours. And they belong to

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a wider class of self-constituting views of the self, not all of which are narrative in structure. But although this answer is the most natural, it is incomplete, because you can and do tell a different story about your life at different times within your life.

The fact that your story of your own life changes over time suffices to prove that none of us are infallible about what our story is. After all, each of us must admit that *by our own lights* we ourselves have got our own stories wrong. We have thought that we were exercising our agency and independence in choosing to listen to that kind of music or date that gender of person, when really, we can now see, we were really adrift in a sea of peer pressure or family and religious indoctrination. And new problems beset us if we privilege any particular story that we tell at any particular time in our lives—different ones, depending on which time we pick, and by which principle. A standard trick is to idealize and to appeal to the story that you *would* tell about your life under some idealized conditions, but there are no guarantees that the story that you would tell under idealized conditions now is the same that you would tell later—or even that the very features that make these idealizations false are not in fact central to who you actually are.

An alternative family of narrative accounts of the self appeals not to you as narrator but to the community of which you are a part. Lindemann (2001) and Brison (2003) both develop rich and instructive versions of this idea, and I think there is much to learn from both of them. But just as individuals can be wrong, communities can be wrong, and the story that they tell can shift from time to time—indeed, the tools of 'narrative resistance' which Lindemann (2001) discusses so illuminatingly are precisely tools to make available alternative forms of narrative in our communities that were not there before.

Again, we could idealize our stories about group narratives in order to exclude the ones that are obviously wrong. But this requires an answer to *why* this idealization helps identify the ones that are right. Idealized stories are not, after all, stories that anyone tells—they are only stories that could possibly have been told. So we need an answer to why that possibility tells us something about what is actual—that is, about who and what you are.

Now, one possible answer is that idealizations work by eliminating the stories that you tell that are not truly yours, in the sense that I have distinguished in this paper. If we are looking for an answer to

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who you are, after all, and you are the one who gets to tell it, it had better not turn out that a telling for which you are not attributively responsible, but which is instead better attributed to indoctrination or insecurity or drugs, turns out to be the one that determines who you are—that wouldn't be a way of giving you authority over yourself, but instead a way of giving your body authority over you. So an idealization definitely *should* do this. But now observe that in addition to the many other problems with first-personal authority and with idealization, an idealization can only do this if the features that we idealize are guaranteed to be conditions under which any story that you tell is guaranteed to be truly yours. But the whole point of the appeal to narrative accounts of the self, according to my argument in the previous section, was precisely that such conditions can only be narratively determined!

So I conclude that the answer to who you are is not determined by the lights of any storyteller, whether singular or plural, and whether actual or idealized. But this does not mean that it cannot be narrative in structure. It just means that it cannot be the narrative of any person or persons. We already know, I suggest, how this goes in the case of other objects that are subject to interpretation. We can't understand contentful thought in general in terms of the content that some contentful thinker interprets it as having, but we *can* understand all contentful thought in terms of what content the best interpretation would attribute to it, and see actual interpreters as doing better or worse at identifying this best interpretation. Similarly, I suggest, since the narrative question of who you are must be a narrative that is there to be discovered, rather than one that we impose, I conclude that it must be the *best* story about who you are.[1]

On this view, which I have again begun to lay out in other places, there are many possible stories about your life. And all of those stories work, as Lindemann (2001) points out in her account of narrative, through inclusion and exclusion. What all of them do is to single out, among the events in your life, where you are the protagonist and where your predicament besets you. Sometimes your predicament lies in the circumstances outside your body, such as a competitor for a promotion. But sometimes your predicament lies inside you—addiction, brainwashing, hypertension, or a strained

[1] That it makes sense to think of ourselves in such terms I argue in Schroeder (2019a), and that this is key to what it takes to treat someone as a person I argue in Schroeder (2019b).

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hamstring. Likewise, sometimes what makes you the protagonist lies inside your body, such as your decision process or strong emotion. But sometimes you the protagonist extend outside of your biological body, through your prosthetic hand, or through the supportive family that facilitates your thriving.

All of them are stories *about* you. You are the protagonist in all of them. But they offer different answers as to which qualities are yours directly and which are yours indirectly. The story that is true is the best one out of all of them. It is the narrative that *constitutes* who you are. Since it constitutes who you are, it is the true story about you, and hence its answers to which qualities are yours directly and which only indirectly are the true ones.

In the hills above the neighbourhood of Los Angeles that is closest to my house, there is a large rock from which the neighborhood is named. Dubbed 'Eagle Rock', it towers above the boundary between Los Angeles and Pasadena, visible at the edge of the San Rafael hills looking out over the city below, and passed every day by thousands of commuters. The image below shows Eagle Rock as it looks today.

Eagle Rock is not a sculpture. It does not look like an eagle because someone interpreted it as an eagle. It probably looked like an eagle even before the predecessors of the Tongva people of the Los Angeles basin encountered it for the first time. Most of the hills don't look like anything, but this rock formation just looks like an eagle, whether anyone sees it or not. This is how the interpretive

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view thinks of persons. Most of the world is full of whats, and these whats are not very whoey. But in some parts of the world, there are some lives that are just whoey enough for there to be good stories according to which there is a who there. When this happens, I say, there *is* a who there, and the features of that who are the ones described by the story that makes it the *most* whoey. This is the best interpretation of who you are.

V

Identity over Time. In other work, I have had much more to say—and still owe more to say—about what makes an interpretation best, and about the presumption of uniqueness entailed by 'best' (see especially Schroeder 2019b, forthcoming). But my purpose in this paper is to complete my story about why we should expect our answers to how you are extended in space, time and quality to all come from a single and unified answer to what kind of things persons are. I have already said something about how my account answers how you are extended in space—we can make narrative sense of how a prosthetic limb might be literally part of you, provided that your story gets filled out in the right way, even though someone else's prosthetic is not or not yet part of them, and we can make sense of why your uterus might be part of you, even though someone else's uterus might only be part of their body. These answers are answers about how you are extended in space, as well as quality. But what about how you are extended in time?

Here we face an important choice point. The interpretive account of persons says that you are the protagonist in the story of your life—not the story that you or anyone else tells, but the story that fits your life the best, regardless of whether you or anyone else appreciates it. But where do the boundaries of your life come from? On a conservative way of developing the interpretive account, which we might call the *book* model, the interpretive account requires a prior answer to what counts as your life. First, we figure out which life is yours, by some other, perhaps non-narrative, criteria, and then we look for the best interpretation of this life. I call this the book account because, at least by and large, it seems that when we interpret books the question of what text we are to interpret is independent of

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our interpretation of it—the text comes from whatever was printed between the bindings, and holding that text fixed we interpret it as best as we can.

The book model does not, I think, tell us very much about how you are extended in time. For you can be extended no further back or forward in time than your life is, and if there are live and interesting questions about the beginning and end of human lives, or about the identity conditions of human lives when human organisms undergo fission or fusion, then these questions must be solved by our account of human lives, which, according to the book model, may not be narrative in nature.

But according to a less conservative development of the interpretive account of persons, the question of how your life is extended over time is *itself* to be settled interpretively—by the lights of which interpretation leads to the most whoey answer to who the who or whos located in your vicinity are. This more ambitious answer takes more seriously the analogy of Eagle Rock, for there is no prior answer to which rocks or which area of a single rock we must look at in order to decide whether it looks like anything. Rather, we can just look at all of it, and whatever part looks most like something, that is the thing that counts as looking like something. So let us call this more ambitious answer the Eagle Rock theory of personal identity.

The Eagle Rock theory is more coherent and unified than the book model. It takes the lessons that the motivations to include narrative in our account of the self more seriously. Is it true? I have run out of words in the space that is allotted to me here to fully defend an affirmative answer. But if you have ever read or watched a work of speculative fiction in which fission, fusion or teleportation have been depicted, and inferred which facts about personal identity are true within the fiction, then you know the answer.

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