**Reductionism in Personal Identity and the Phenomenological Sense of Being a Temporally Extended Self.**

Robert Schroer, the University of Minnesota-Duluth

Abstract

The special and unique attitudes that we take towards events in our futures/pasts—e.g., attitudes like the dread of an impeding pain—create a challenge for “Reductionist” accounts that reduce persons to aggregates of interconnected person stages: if the person stage currently dreading tomorrow’s pain is *numerically distinct* from the person stage that will actually suffer the pain, what reason could the current person stage have for thinking of that future pain *as being his*?  One reason everyday subjects believe they have a substantially extended temporal existence stems from introspection—they *introspectively experience* their selves as being temporally extended. In this paper, I examine whether a Reductionist about personal identity can co-opt this explanation. Using Galen Strawson’s recent work on self-experience as a resource, I reach both a negative and a positive conclusion about the prospects of such a position. First, the relevant kind of self-experience—i.e., the introspective experience of one’s self as being a substantially temporally extended entity—will notautomatically arise within a person stage simply in virtue of that stage being psychologically connected to/continuous with other person stages. Second, the relevant kind of self-experience will arise, however, in virtue of person stages weaving together their respective experiences, actions, etc. *via a narrative*. This positive conclusion points towards a new Reductionist position that focuses upon a narrative, and not mere psychological continuity, in attempting to justify the special attitudes we take towards events in our futures/pasts.

I. Reductionism and the “special” attitudes

The literature on personal identity tends to focus upon what Marya Schechtman (1996) calls “the reidentification question”—i.e., the question of what makes a person at time t2 the same person as a person at time t1. If, for expositional simplicity, we refer to the person at t2 as “Future Bob” and the person at t1 as “Current Bob”, the reidentification question is “What makes Future Bob and Current Bob the same person?”[[1]](#endnote-1)

A popular answer to the reidentification question focuses on the psychology of Current Bob and Future Bob. Proponents of this general approach are often (but not always) “Reductionists” in that they maintain that persons are aggregates of numerically distinct elements—i.e., “person stages”—that are bound together into “persons” via various psychological relations.[[2]](#endnote-2) According to Derek Parfit’s (1984) influential account, for instance, persons are aggregates of person stages that are psychologically continuouswith one another, where “psychological continuity” is understood in terms of overlapping chains of strong psychological connectedness. To explain the notion of “strong psychological connectedness”, I first need explain the more basic notion of psychological connectedness. “Psychological connectedness” consists of direct connections between memories and the experiences that the memories purport to be of, direct connections between intentions and subsequent actions, and the overlap and continuation of various beliefs, desires, etc. Parfit stipulates that if the number of such direct connections/overlaps between person stages is at least half the number of such connections that obtain every day in the lives of most people, then those person stages qualify as being “strongly psychologically connected” to one another.[[3]](#endnote-3) In this paper, I will follow Parfit’s lead and interpret the notion of “psychological continuity/connectedness” in these same terms.

There is a longstanding concern that Reductionist accounts are incapable of accommodating the “special” attitudes we take towards various experiences, actions, etc. in our pasts/futures. Common sense mandates that it is appropriate for Current Bob to take a special interest in the painful operation that Future Bob is scheduled to undergo tomorrow, an interest that differs from the interest he would take in the operation if it were instead a family member or a friend who was scheduled to undergo it.[[4]](#endnote-4) The challenge facing the Reductionist is to explain why adopting this special attitude towards future pain is appropriate. This challenge is normative: the challenge is not to say why, as a matter of descriptive/psychological fact, I take a special interest in tomorrow’s pain. The challenge, rather, is to say what *justifies* my doing so. The intuitive answer, of course, is that this special interest is appropriate/justified because it is *me* that will undergo the pain or, to put things a bit more formally, because I’m (numerically) identical to subject who will undergo the pain. According to the Reductionist’s metaphysics, however, the entity that will undergo the painful experience is *not* numericallyidentical to the entity that is currently anticipating and dreading it. Instead, these are distinct entities that are merely psychologically connected to/continuous with one another.[[5]](#endnote-5)

In response to this concern about justifying the special attitudes, Reductionists often point out that although the *person stages* that make up a person are numerically distinct from one another, *the person* they compose is identical with himself over time.[[6]](#endnote-6) What’s more, when *person stages* have thoughts, experiences, or perform actions, they do so on behalf of *the person* that they help to compose.

…the present self can act as a representative of the temporally dispersed entity, the person, by acting in the interests of this being. If so, then the fact that the temporally extended person is ‘not all there’ at the time of the action is not a reason to deny that it is the actor or the entity whose interests determine what agents have reason to do. (Brink, 1997, p. 115)

The idea here is that even though Current Bob and Future Bob, *qua person stages*, are numerically distinct from one another, they have the experiences, thoughts, etc. they do on behalf of one and the same person: namely, Bob. And since Bob, *qua person*, is identical with himself, there is no mystery about why it’s appropriate for him to adopt a special attitude of self-interested concern towards tomorrow’s pain, *for that pain will be his*.

But does such an account really solve the problem facing Reductionism on this front? Schechtman, for one, doesn’t think so. Building off of Lewis’ (1976) assertion that person stages are experiencing subjects in their own right, she points out that—

Person-stages…have psychological states; they take actions; they would themselves be persons if they were not parts of a larger aggregate. How then is it possible that a perfectly good subject of experience suddenly takes on a different attitude simply because there are subjects psychologically like it nearby in time? (1996, p. 59)

I’m particularly interested in a “switch in attitude” that involves a person stage coming to *experience* itself as being a “person”—i.e., as being something with a substantialpast and a substantial future.[[7]](#endnote-7) Schechtman is skeptical that mere psychological connectedness/continuity is enough to engender such a radical “switch in attitude”. Reductionists, of course, are likely to disagree.

Before weighing in on this debate, I want to highlight its importance. For sake of argument, suppose that the Reductionist proposal described above was viable—suppose that being psychologically connected to/continuous with other person stages engendered “a switch in attitude” where a person stage comes to *experience* itself (and not just *think* of itself) as being a temporally extended entity (i.e., a person). If this were true, it would have significant ramifications for the project of justifying the special attitudes. In epistemology, the idea that perceptual experiences provide (at least *prima facie*) immediate justification for beliefs about the external environment is widespread—the idea has both a great deal of intuitive plausibility and is supported by arguments like the regress argument.[[8]](#endnote-8) An extension of this Foundationalist idea, applicable to the case at hand, would be that *introspective* experience of the self—i.e., self-experience—provides (at least *prima facie*) immediate justification for beliefs about the self. So by appropriating some (independently plausible) Foundationalist epistemology, a Reductionist could potentially *justify* the special attitudes we take towards events in the future and past by appealing to a type of *self-experience*, a type of self-experience that is induced in a given person stage in virtue of its psychological connectedness/continuity with other person stages. Such a Reductionist account of the “special” attitudes would have the extra advantage of being faithful to one of the actual reasons everyday subjects adopt the special attitudes: namely, their introspective experiences.

The key question facing such a Reductionist account is whether being psychologically connected to/continuous with other person stages really does engender “a switch in attitude” where a person stage comes to experience itself as being a (significantly) temporally extended entity. It is to this question that I now turn.

II. Psychological connectedness/continuity and the phenomenological sense of being a temporally extended self

As I mentioned above, one reason people believe that they are temporally extended beings is because they have a phenomenological sense of themselves as such. It’s time to take a closer look at the character of this phenomenological experience. Following the lead of Galen Strawson (2004, 2007, 2009), I think that one can experience oneself as an inner mental entity of some sort, an entity that Strawson refers to as a “self”. (This is in contrast to experiencing oneself as a “human being”—i.e., a physical or biological entity of some sort. Following Strawson’s lead, I’ll use “starred” notation like “I\*”, “me\*”, etc. to refer to my *self*.) In doing so, there is a tendency to conceive of one’s self in *diachronic* terms:

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. (Strawson, 2004, p. 190)

As we’ll soon see, Strawson does not think that everybody’s self-experience has a diachronic character—some people undergo a form of self-experience that has an “episodic” character. Before discussing the latter claim and its implications for the project of justifying the special attitudes via self-experience, however, I want to take a moment to elaborate upon the phenomenological character of *diachronic* self-experience.[[9]](#endnote-9)

What does it mean, exactly, to the experience one’s self in diachronicterms? Part of what it means is that seemingly remembered past events, as well as certain imagined/anticipated future events, will experientially seem as though they are events that involve me\*— i.e., they will experientially seem as though they involve the same self that is currently pondering those past/future events via his memory and imagination. This description of the character of diachronic self-experience quickly leads to a follow-up question: namely, what does it mean to experience these past/future events as being events *that involve me\**? Can this phenomenological experience—the experience of past/future events as being events that involve me\*—be analyzed in terms of even more basic phenomenological elements?

In what follows, I will uncover some considerations that suggest a negative answer to this question. More specifically, I will show that this phenomenological feeling *cannot* be understood in terms of (or reduced to) the phenomenology of memory or a feeling of affective “warmth”. This, in turn, points towards (while not completely securing) the position that the phenomenological experience of past/future events as being events that involve me\* is a brute, unanalyzable phenomenological fact.[[10]](#endnote-10)

Now that I’ve made some preliminary comments about the character of diachronic self-experience, let’s explore the possibility of a Reductionist position about personal identity that appeals to diachronic self-experience to justifythe special attitudes. More specifically, let’s explore a Reductionist position that claims psychological connectedness/continuity between person stages engenders a “switch in attitude” whereby individual person stages come to have the self-experiences they do on behalf of *the person* they compose—i.e., they come to have *diachronic* self-experiences, self-experiences as of a temporally extended being.

If we don’t challenge the assumption that introspective experience provides (at least *prima facie*) justification for beliefs about the self, the main question facing such a Reductionist position is whether psychological connectedness/continuity between person stages is causally sufficient for generating diachronic self-experience. To see why a Reductionist might be tempted to think that this is so, recall Locke’s (often quoted) description of memory as “consciousness extending backwards”. Given this intuitive description of memory, it might be tempting to think that if psychological connectedness/continuity involves, among other things, memories, then it could at least give rise to a phenomenological sense of the self as being (significantly) extended into the past. To put the point another way, if the phenomenology of diachronic self-experience is, in part, reducible to the phenomenology of a particular species of memory, then psychological connectedness/continuity (which involves that species of memory) will be causally sufficient for some of the phenomenological character of diachronic self-experience.

Unfortunately for our imagined Reductionist, psychological connectedness/continuity is *not* causally sufficient for generating diachronic self-experience. To find a counterexample to this Reductionist proposal, we need to delve a bit deeper into Strawson’s discussion of self-experience. As I noted earlier, in undergoing self-experience most people experience their selves in diachronic terms. Strawson maintains, however, that some do *not* experience their selves as temporally extended entities. Instead, they undergo “episodic self-experience” in which

[o]ne 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. (Strawson 2004, p. 190)

Of course, an “Episodic” might experience her living body as being something that was there in the past and will be there in the future. She does not, however, experience her *self* in the same way. As evidence for the existence of episodic self-experience, Strawson relies upon various first-person reports; here, for instance, is such a report from Henry James

I think of…the masterpiece in question…as the work of a quite another person than myself…a rich…relation, say, who…suffers me still to claim shy fourth cousinship. (Quoted in Strawson 2007*,* p. 209)

Although James may think of himself as the same human being (i.e., the same living organism) as the one who wrote the masterpiece, he does not feel as though he is the same *self*. (This, at least, is how Strawson reads James’ description.[[11]](#endnote-11)) What’s more, Strawson himself claims to be an Episodic:

I feel I have continuity through the waking day only as an embodied human being. If I consider myself specifically as a mental subject of experience, my deep sense, as remarked, is that I’m continually new. (2009, p. 246-7)

For what it’s worth, there are times where I undergo an experience akin to that of the Episodic; there are times when, in experiencing myself as a self, I do not experience that self as something that was there in the past or will be there in the future.[[12]](#endnote-12) My late night decision to have a glass of wine (or two) too many, for instance, is tinged by a feeling of sympathy for the poor soul who will have to deal with the hangover. Phenomenologically, in making that decision, it’s not as if I perform a utilitarian analysis and decide that *I’m* willing to suffer the ramifications of drinking a glass (or two) too many in the morning. (To put the point another way, when I consider what it will be like to deal with the hangover in the morning, the event I imagine does not experientially seem like it involves me\*.) Instead, it’s more like I perform a utilitarian analysis and decide that I’m willing to inflict those ramifications *upon someone else*—another “self”. To be clear, it’s someone I care deeply about; nevertheless it’s someone who, at least at the moment of the decision, *doesn’t feel as though he will be me\**.[[13]](#endnote-13)

The claim that some of us undergo episodic self-experience is bound to be controversial; in his review of Strawson’s book *Selves*, Sydney Shoemaker (2009, p. 4) asserts that “I have no conception of what experience of the sort described would be like if it were not pathological”. Despite this controversy, I am going to take this claim for granted and forge ahead. For episodic self-experience to serve as a counterexample to the claim that psychological connectedness/continuity between person stages is causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience, I need to argue that it’s possible for a person stage to undergo episodic self-experiences despite being psychologically connected to/continuous with other person stages. Towards that end, recall Parfit’s description of “psychological connectedness” as involving direct connections between memories and the experiences that the memories purport to be of, direct connections between intentions and subsequent actions, and an overlap of beliefs, desires, and so on. There is nothing in Strawson’s description of Episodics that suggests that such “direct connections” and “overlaps” cannot obtain between the person stages of an Episodic. After all, Episodics are (generally) not amnesiacs—e.g., Henry James was not an amnesiac, Strawson is not an amnesiac, etc. This means that there (typically) will be “direct connections” between the memories of an Episodic and various earlier experiences, connections where the latter cause the former and the former are of the latter.[[14]](#endnote-14) Episodics also do not (typically) undergo rapid, widespread changes in their beliefs and desires from moment to moment; like the rest of us, the corpus of an Episodic’s beliefs/desires tends to change gradually. And Episodics also do not (typically) fail to act on earlier intensions; to borrow an example from Strawson, an Episodic can undertake (and execute) the long-term project of writing a book. It’s just that in executing this long-term project an Episodic doesn’t feel as though the author of earlier/later drafts is/will be the same self as the one who is currently working on the book. (Recall the earlier quotation from Henry James.)

In these respects—respects that are germane to Parfit’s accounts of “psychological connectedness” and “psychological continuity”—Episodics end up being a lot like Diachronics. There are, of course, important psychological differences between Episodics and Diachronics: most significantly, Diachronics have a phenomenological sense of their selves as being temporally extended entities while Episodics do not. This difference, however, is *irrelevant* to the question of whether there are direct connections between the mental states/actions of the various person stages of an Episodic. In most case, there are such direct connections; it’s just that the Episodic does not experience the relevant, non-current mental states/actions *as being hers\**, in the sense of belonging to her *self*. I suppose that someone could redefine Parfit’s account of “psychological connectedness” to include the stipulation that all the relevant mental states *must feel like they belong to the same temporally extended self*. But now the threat of circularity looms: if the project is to explain diachronic self-experience in terms of psychological connectedness, then “psychological connectedness” cannot be defined, in part, in terms of a phenomenological sense of the relevant mental states as belonging to one’s *temporally extended self*.[[15]](#endnote-15)

I can further illustrate the point that psychological connectedness/continuity is not causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience by zeroing in on a single thread in the braid of psychological connectedness: memory. It’s possible to have (apparent) memories of an earlier experience—memories from a “first person perspective”—without the phenomenological feeling that the experience in question was mine\*. (This point, if accepted, establishes that the phenomenology of diachronic self-experience cannot be reduced, in part, to the phenomenology of memory, for you can have the phenomenology of the latter without having the phenomenology of the former.) As Strawson (2004) puts the point—

…the from-the-inside character of a memory can detach completely from any sense that one is the subject of the remembered experience. My memory of falling out of a boat has an essentially from-the-inside character, visually (the water rushing up to meet me), kinaesthetically, proprioceptively, and so on. It certainly does not follow that it carries any feeling or belief that what is remembered happened to me\*, to that which I now apprehend myself to be when I am apprehending myself specifically as a self. (p. 194-5)

The mental state Strawson describes is an apparent memory, a memory from the first person perspective, where the seemingly remembered experience doesn’t feel as though it happened to his *self*. Despite this, there is still a “Parfitian” connection between the experience and the memory: the experience *caused* the memory and the memory *is of* the experience. As a result, this apparent memory (and the experience it purports to be of) contributes to the overall psychological connectedness between Current Strawson and Earlier Strawson. The same is true of the continuing overlap in what each person stage believes and desires, even if Current Strawson does not have a phenomenological sense of the beliefs/desires of Earlier Strawson as having belonged to his *self*. And the same also holds true for the causal connections between the intentions formed by Earlier Strawson and some of the actions performed by Current Strawson.

With these points in hand, let’s quickly revisit the topic of whether the phenomenological character of diachronic self-experience—i.e., the experiential sense of various remembered or anticipated events as involving me\*—can be analyzed via more basic phenomenological elements. The above discussion reveals that the phenomenology of diachronic self-experience *cannot* be reduced to the phenomenology of memory, the phenomenology of having continuing beliefs/desires, or the phenomenology of having intentions and subsequently acting upon them, for an Episodic can have the all of these mental states (and their accompanying phenomenology) *without* undergoing diachronic self-experience.

Can the phenomenology of diachronic self-experience be reduced to the phenomenology of some other kind of mental state? Some memories have an affective component: the memory of the first date I had with my spouse, for instance, has a phenomenological “warmth” to it, a “warmth” that is (to a degree) recreated in me each time I remember our date.[[16]](#endnote-16) As Strawson (2004, p. 195) notes, however, an Episodic can have such memories that are infused with emotional content (like “warmth”) and yet still not have an experiential sense of the subject of the remembered event as being him\*. So not only can the phenomenological character of diachronic self-experience *not* be analyzed in terms of the phenomenology of memory, overlapping beliefs/desires, and other mental states involved in psychological connectedness/continuity, it also *cannot* be analyzed in terms of the affective phenomenology accompanying various memories.

Let’s take a step back and summarize. The person stages of an Episodic can be (and typically are) psychologically connected to one another and psychologically continuous with one another. So the psychological connectedness/continuity of a person stage with other person stages is *not causally sufficient* for a given person stage to undergo diachronic self-experience. (As we’ve just seen, this claim would continue to be true even if we supplemented the notion of “psychological connectedness/continuity” to include memories infused with affective phenomenology or “warmth”.) This, in turn, constitutes a counterexample to the Reductionist claim that I am exploring in this section, the claim that psychological connectedness/continuity between person stages is causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience.

What ramifications does this negative conclusion have in the wider context of Reductionist accounts of personal identity and the special attitudes? To start with, it dooms any Reductionist account that aims to ground the special attitudes in the phenomenological sense of our selves while maintaining that this experience arises *solely* in virtue of psychological connectedness/continuity. It does not, however,impact Reductionist attempts to ground the special attitudes in something other than our phenomenological sense of our selves.[[17]](#endnote-17) Nor does this negative conclusion impact a Reductionist account that attempts to ground the special attitudes in our phenomenological sense of ourselves while maintaining that this experience arises in virtue of some other relation obtaining between person stages, a relation besidesthat of psychological connectedness/continuity. The possibility of the latter position is particularly intriguing, for it would be a Reductionist account of the special attitudes that continues to be faithful to one of the reasons that everyday subjects actually adopt these attitudes. I develop such a position in the next section.

III. The self-told narrative and the phenomenological sense of being a temporally extended self

We’ve seen that psychological connectedness/continuity is causally insufficient for diachronic self-experience. If we are to salvage a Reductionist position that justifies the special attitudes via an appeal to diachronic self-experience, we need some other Reductionist-friendly account of what gives rise to diachronic self-experience. At times, Strawson suggests that whether or not a given subject undergoes diachronic or episodic self-experience is determined by one’s biology.[[18]](#endnote-18) A Reductionist could co-opt this idea and claim that the special attitudes are justified by diachronic self-experience while asserting that this type of self-experience arises in virtue of the biology of the person stage in question, and not in virtue of its psychological connectedness with/continuity to other person stages.

Although such a position is consistent, I believe that it’s not completely faithful to the causal mechanism that typicallygenerates diachronic self-experience in subjects. So while I don’t want to discount the idea that there could be genetically endowed predispositions that are relevant to whether a subject has diachronic self-experience or episodic self-experience in a given situation, I think such predispositions can be (and typically are) enhanced and supplemented by another factor: namely, the construction of a narrative.[[19]](#endnote-19) The basic idea is that when temporally distinct person stages bind their experiences, memories, anticipations, etc. together *via a narrative*, they will thereby undergo diachronic self-experience. (If some of those person stages were already undergoing diachronic self-experience, due to biological predispositions, the narrative would enhance this experience and perhaps spread it to others person stages within the same person.) According to my account, then, participating in such a narrative is causally sufficient, but not causally necessary, for an individual person stage to undergo a “switch in attitude” where it comes to experiences itself as *a person*—i.e., a temporally extended being—and not merely as a person stage.

To be clear, I’m not the first person to claim that the construction of a narrative impacts the character of one’s experiences. Schechtman (1996, 2007, 2011) makes the same claim and by reviewing her position we can gain important insights about how a Reductionist can tackle the problem of the special attitudes by appealing to diachronic self-experience. (As we shall see, however, Schechtman thinks that a narrative approach to personal identity results in a *non*-Reductionist position.[[20]](#endnote-20) My project is a significant departure from hers in that regard. I’ll return to, and elaborate upon, this difference between us in the next section.)

Unlike mere psychological connectedness/continuity, a narrative organizes and unifies the relevant mental states/actions into a self-told story where the subject views herself as an evolving protagonist. As a result, a narrative makes temporally distinct mental states/actions something more than just a sequence of distinct events that happen to overlap and be causally interconnected with one another.[[21]](#endnote-21) Weaving together various mental states, actions, etc. in this manner has a *phenomenological impact* upon those elements in that renders them “co-conscious”—i.e., it makes them elements *within one and the same (extended) consciousness*.[[22]](#endnote-22)

As evidence for this last claim, Schechtman points out that when two mental elements are co-conscious in *the synchronic case*—i.e., when they are elements of one and the same consciousness *at the same moment*—they impact and influence each other.

…in the consciousness of a six-word sentence, each word is interpreted in light of the other five; in ordinary perceptual experience, visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory input, as well as cognitive factors, cohere to produce a unified experience; and when a subject hears a chord, it is the relation between the notes which is heard, as well as the notes themselves. (Schechtman 1996, p. 137)

From examples like this, Schechtman generalizes to a broad criterion for when synchronic mental elements are elements within one and the same consciousness: namely, when they “mutually interact in a way that produces a unified experience in which each plays a role, and plays the role it does because it serves as an interpretative context for the others, which in turn provide its context” (1996, p. 139).[[23]](#endnote-23) In order for *temporally distinct* mental elements to be “co-conscious”—in order for them to be mental elements within one and the same *temporally extended consciousness*—they must influence and mutually interact in roughly the same way as they do in the synchronic case. This, in turn, is what happens when such elements are woven together into a narrative:

The discussion of the impact in later life of youthful financial security or parental approval…shows just how deeply past actions and experiences can influence the nature of present subjectivity, whereas the contrast between poverty as experienced by the graduate student and by the discouraged welfare father shows the difference forward-looking appropriation can make. (Schechtman 1996, p. 142)

A quick aside: I’ve been focusing upon the capacity of the narrative to unify temporally distinct mental elements into one and the same extended consciousness. It’s important to note, however, that the same notion can also be used to determine the *identity* of that consciousness. With regard to doing the latter, not just any old story that you spin about your life can determine your genuine identity. (I can’t make myself George Washington by spinning the appropriate self-told story.) Among other things, in order to be *identity constituting* anarrative needs to be both intelligible and coherent. (More carefully, full intelligibility/coherence of one’s self-told story are ideals to which people aim at and typically fall a bit short of.) An identity-constituting narrative also needs be capable of (local) articulation; you need to be able to answer questions about the story of life, and your answers cannot be that far off from those given by others if they were asked the similar questions about your life.

Now let’s get back to the main topic at hand: the connection between possessing a narrative and undergoing diachronic self-experience. I think Schechtman has developed a plausible account of a (causally) sufficient condition for temporally distinct mental events, actions, etc. *being co-conscious*. What’s more, I think a connection can be made between her notion of “co-consciousness” and Strawson’s notion of diachronic self-experience. More specifically, I think that the structuring/organizing of temporally distinct mental elements via the type of narrative described by Schechtman *is (causally) sufficient for generating diachronic self-experience.* When a person stage—say Current Bob—employs a narrative to actively structure/organize temporally distinct experiences, actions, etc., those mental elements come to impact and influence the character of his current consciousness. (And his current consciousness, in turn, provides the context for future experiences, actions, etc.) As a result of this mutual influence, Current Bob comes to experience the relevant (non-current) mental elements, actions, etc. as being his\*. He thereby acquires a phenomenal sense of his self *as being a temporally extended being*.

As an illustration of this idea, let’s revisit the example, from Strawson, of the remembered experience of falling off a boat. As an Episodic, Strawson’s (apparent) memory of this event is from a first-person perspective and yet it does not feel as though it involved his *self*. In a twist, let’s try modifying some of the details of this case. Suppose that the earlier person stage that fell of the boat and the later person stage that seemingly remembers this event both structure their lives around the same narrative: a narrative whose evolving protagonist thinks of himself as (and takes great pride in being) an exceptional sailor. The details of this self-told story might include the protagonist growing up on sailboats, living on sailboats and being paid to deliver them as a young man, winning regional and national regattas, refining his skills and learning many important lessons about sailboats and sailing “the hard way”, and so on.

The experience of falling off a boat will be significantly different, phenomenologically, for a person stage that structured his experiences, etc. around such a narrative than it would be for one who didn’t. For the former, the sensation of falling will immediately be taken as a sign that something has gone wrong *with the boat* and not as a sign that something has gone wrong *with the sailor*. An experienced, confident sailor will automatically assume that his falling off a boat is not the result of some failure of his—after all, he knows where to step, how to keep his balance, what parts of the rigging will and will not support his weight, etc. Instead, he will automatically assume that the failure must reside with the boat—a lifeline has snapped, a harness has given way, the boat has struck a submerged object, etc. And, as he is falling, the emotion he experiences will be dread of the ensuing grief he’ll get from his crew, and not fear of drowning or of being left behind in the water, for he’ll know that (in most circumstances) there is more than enough time to tread water while a competent crew quickly turns a boat around. Later, the remembered experience could give rise to an intense, potentially identity-threatening feeling of shame: after all, *amateurs* fall off boats*, real sailors* do not. In these ways and more, the narrative impacts and influences the phenomenological character of the experience of falling off a boat and provides context for future experiences, mental states, actions, etc. As a result of this mutual influence—a mutual influence *not* present in Strawson’s original description of the case—the current person stage will have a *phenomenological sense* of the remembered event *as having occurred to him\** and, as a result, will have a phenomenal sense of his self *as a temporally extended being*.[[24]](#endnote-24)

I’ve just sketched a Reductionist-friendly account of diachronic self-experience, an account that grounds this experience in something morethan just relations of psychological connectedness between person stages. My proposal is that by weaving together their respective experiences, actions, etc. via a self-told narrative, *numerically distinct person stages will thereby come to have diachronic self-experiences*. These phenomenal experiences, in turn, can justify the adoption of the special attitudes that were the topic of section I.

In the next section, I examine two important objections to this account, objections that come from two philosophers whose ideas have already loomed large in the arguments of this paper: Galen Strawson and Marya Schechtman.

IV. Two objections

The first objection comes from Strawson, who claims that it’s possible for someone to organizes his life via “a narrative” and yet only undergo *episodic* self-experience. This challenges my claim that structuring or framing temporally distinct mental elements, actions, etc. via a narrative is causally sufficientfor undergoing diachronic self-experience.

In his book *Selves*, Strawson asserts that an Episodic who is “narrative” is possible, even though such a person is uncommon.[[25]](#endnote-25) But there is not much more to his argument beyond this bare claim. In “Against Narrativity”, the same claim is laid out in a bit more detail. In the latter piece, Strawson argues for the possibility of someone who has a “form-finding tendency”—i.e., someone who seeks patterns, coherence, and unity in apprehending her life, —and yet does *not* undergo diachronic self-experience.[[26]](#endnote-26) (In a footnote, Strawson identifies Jack Kerouac as an example.) Since one way of “form finding” in considering one’s life is through a narrative, it follows that if, in general, form finding is not causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience, then the specific form of form-finding in which I’m interested—i.e., structuring one’s life via a narrative—is also not causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience.

In response to Strawson’s argument, I’m happy to allow that there could be people who have a form-finding tendency, a form-finding tendency that did *not* involve structuring their lives via a narrative, who are also Episodics. What I deny is that there are people with a form-finding tendency *that involves structuring their lives via a narrative* who are Episodics. In virtue of framing his argument in extremely general terms—in virtue of framing it in terms of “form finding” in general, and not in terms of the particular version of “form finding” in which I’m interested—it’s not clear to me what evidence Strawson really has against my position. Reconsider, for example, the claim that Kerouac was an Episodic who had a form-finding tendency. Did his form-finding tendency involving structuring his life via a narrative? Strawson doesn’t say and, as a result, we can’t tell if this particular example can legitimately serve as an objection to my (more specific) claim that structuring one’s life via a narrative is causally sufficient for undergoing diachronic self-experience. (After all, I can allow that someone could have a form-finding tendency while also undergoing episodic self-experience as long as the relevant form-finding tendency does not involve a narrative.) In this way, then, there is simply not enough detail presented in Strawson’s cases to determine whether they serve as a threat to my position, a position that allows that some kinds of form-finding tendencies are not sufficient for undergoing diachronic self-experience while maintaining that other kinds of form-finding tendencies—in particular, having a tendency to structure one’s live *via a narrative*—are causally sufficient for such an experience.

This response to Strawson, a response that distinguishes the structuring of the events of one’s life via a narrative from other form-finding tendencies, invites an important follow-up question: namely, what does it take to count as having “structured one’s life via a narrative”? Several have claimed that the defender of a Narrative Account is destined to be impaled by one of two horns in answering this question: either she will give an answer that is *too strong* to be plausible or she will give an answer that is *too weak* to be informative.[[27]](#endnote-27) An answer that required one to craft a self-story that “approximates as much as possible a story created by a gifted author and edited by a talented editor”, for instance, clearly sets the bar too high.[[28]](#endnote-28) In contrast, an answer that merely requires that the subject think ahead and undertake a series of actions in the right order sets the bar too low, for now the simple process of making coffee qualifies as an instance of structuring one’s life via a narrative.[[29]](#endnote-29)

Articulating the necessary and sufficient conditions for possessing a narrative is a complicated project that I will not fully undertake here. Instead, I will follow Marya Schechtman’s (2007) lead in thinking that there is a middle position between the two extremes mentioned above:

Towards the middle of the spectrum are conceptions of life-narrative that involve not just a sequential listing of life events, but also an account of the explanatory relations between them—a story of how the events in one’s history lead to other events in that history. (2007, p.160)

The basic idea is that in structuring one’s life via a narrative there will be an extra layer of explanatory connections between one’s temporally disparate mental states and life events, a layer that would be absent if one were merely “thinking ahead” and/or listing life events in a certain order. This is what separates the middle position of what it takes to “have a narrative” from the weak position, described above. Although this extra layer of explanation need not take the form of a complete story that, in its consistency and quality, would approximate a novel written by a talented author and edited by a talented editor, it does need to “employ the kind of logic found in stories when they describe, explain, and choose their behavior” (Schechtman 2011, p. 398). This, in turn, is what separates the middle position from the strong position, described above.

Much more could (and probably should) be said about the above-described middle position. I’ll assume, however, that the sketch I provided of how this middle position undermines the concern that Narrative Accounts are destined to set the bar too high or too low is good enough to allow me to continue forging ahead. (Filling in the finer details of this middle position will have to be a project for another day.)

I’d like to end my discussion of Strawson’s objection—i.e., that a “form-finding tendency” is not causally sufficient for diachronic self-experience—with some general comments about why “finding form” in one’s life via a narrative gives rise to diachronic self-experience. Viewing one’s life in this way involves a kind of activity—an activity of *self-interpretation* and *self-creation*—not found in other forms of “form-finding” that involve *passively* cataloguing events, noticing patterns, and so on. In structuring one’s life via a narrative, one interprets oneself as an *evolving protagonist*,which allows one to play a part in creating one’s own self.[[30]](#endnote-30) This activity of self-interpretation and self-creation shapes the character of the subject’s self-experience; it makes certain past/future events—events that play a significant roles in her narratives—*seem like they involve her\**. (Recall that I’m not claiming that this is the only way that these events could come to feel as though they involve her\*. I’m merely identifying one causally sufficient condition for such an experience; I allow that this experience could arise in other ways as well.) In this way, our self-experience is “theory-laden”, where the “theory” is the narrative the subject uses to structure and make sense of her own life.

Let’s transition from Strawson’s objection (and the issues it raises) to another equally important objection to my project. This objection comes from Schechtman, who develops the Narrative Account along *non-Reductionist* lines. Recall that in the context of personal identity, the distinction between “Reductionism” and “non-Reductionism” has to do with whether all the mental states of a *person* can be reduced to the mental states of individual *person stages*. Schechtman claims that at least some of the mental states of a person cannot be so reduced. My task is to convince you that, *pace* Schechtman, that they can.

The standard “non-Reductionist” position in personal identity identifies persons with Cartesian souls.[[31]](#endnote-31) Schechtman does not go this route; instead, she identifies persons with *extended narrative egos*.[[32]](#endnote-32) So why, exactly, can’t an extended narrative ego be “reduced” to the mental states/actions of a series person stages? In giving a negative answer this question, Schechtman draws an analogy to a stew: although the ingredients exist prior to the stew, their contribution to the overall flavor of that soup cannot be completely understood in terms of anything that exists priorto the soup itself.[[33]](#endnote-33) Just as the overall flavor of the soup cannot be completely understood by merely citing the flavors of the individual ingredients considered independently of one another, the experiences and other mental states of *a person* cannot be completely understood in terms of the psychological properties of *person stages* considered independently of one another.

It is by no means obvious that the most essential part of a person’s experience at any time can be reproduced in an independent time-slice, even if we imagine that slice containing all of the relevant forward- and backward-looking elements. (Schechtman 1996, p. 144)

Schechtman allows that an individual time-slice could instantiate some of the psychological properties possessed by persons, including something like (apparent) memories and expectations with regard to the future. She claims, however, “…the contribution the past and future make to the present is more than just the production of memories and anticipations, it is something deeper” (1996, p. 144). What is this “something deeper”? In answering this question, she cites, with approval, the following passage from Richard Wollheim:

The phenomenology of past and future states is not just something that we infer to be the case. It inheres in the present...For entering into present states, we do so as persisting creatures who will enter into future states and have entered into pasts. (Richard Wollheim, as quoted in Schechtman 1996, p. 145)

Although this provocative passage could be interpreted in a number of ways, I will read it as pointing to *diachronic self-experience*—i.e., the phenomenological experience of the self as a temporally extended entity.[[34]](#endnote-34) Interpreted this way, Schechtman’s non-Reductionism amounts to the claim that *individual person stages could not undergo diachronic self-experience*. So although some forward- and backward-looking mental states could be reproduced in a person stage that has no (substantial) past or future, the phenomenological experience of oneself as being a temporally extended entity cannot. In order to have thatexperience, the subject in question must really be a temporally extended being; she must be “an extended narrative ego”, a persisting object with some psychological properties that *cannot* be replicated in isolated, individual time-slices.

A Reductionist such as myself, in contrast, thinks the psychology of a person *can* be entirely explained in terms of the psychology of the person stages that compose her. To make the case for such a Reductionist position, I will end this paper by attempting to describe what Schechtman says is impossible: namely, a single, isolated person stage that undergoes diachronic self-experience.

Suppose that in some distant corner of the galaxy God created a new planet—call it “Double Earth”—1 second ago, but did so in a way that makes all its inhabitants think that Double Earth is approximately 5 billion years ago.[[35]](#endnote-35) Suppose further that one of those inhabitants—we can call him “1 Second Bob”—is molecule-for-molecule qualitatively identical with me, right now.[[36]](#endnote-36) Like me, a 1 Second Bob has a variety of beliefs, desires, and (apparent) memories.[[37]](#endnote-37) What’s more, there are many similarities between the contents of our beliefs, desires, and (apparent) memories—although, of course, the majority of 1 Second Bob’s memories are false.

Like me, 1 Second Bob will view his various mental events, actions, etc. through the lens of *a self-told narrative*, a narrative that he believes he has been constructing over the past 30-plus years. Unlike me, however, most of the purported mental events, actions, etc. that he attempts to organize relative to one another in this fashion *didn’t actually take place*. The past experiences, actions, etc. that he seems to remember undergoing/doing *didn’t really happen*. Heck, we can even posit that most of the experiences, actions, etc. that he anticipates as happening *in the future* will not happen either. (Perhaps God despises 1 Second Bob and will destroys Double Earth before any of his short-term or long-term plans can unfold.)

With regard to what it’s like to be 1 Second Bob, none of this matters; all that matters is that he seemingly remembers certain events taking place in the past, he thinks/anticipates that other events are likely to take place in the future, and during his brief (actual) existence he weaves these events together in a self-told narrative. As a result, these events experientially seem to involve him\*. It doesn’t matter that 1 Second Bob didn’t actually acquire a PhD in philosophy, didn’t actually fall in love with another philosopher, didn’t actually get lucky enough to land a tenure-track job, didn’t actually grow disillusioned with that job, didn’t actually adjust his priorities, didn’t actually give up tenure in order to move to another institution, and isn’t actually going to have a future where he strives to do a little less philosophy and a little more sailing. All that matters is that during the brief period of his actual existence, he views his life through the lens of this story and, as a result, the story shapes the character of his current (brief) consciousness.

It seems to me that 1 Second Bob can have all this despite not having a (substantial) past*.* And in virtue of having all this, he will undergo diachronic self-experience; he will have a sense of himself as a (significantly) temporally extended being. As it turns out, this phenomenological sense is mistaken; he’s not, in fact, a significantly temporally extended entity. But that’s fine; recall that diachronic self-experience provides *prima facie* justification, not *infallible* justification, for thinking of one’s self as temporally extended. This self-experience, in turn, gives 1 Second Bob *prima facie* justification for undertaking attitudes of special concern towards certain events he thinks will happen in the future and that he believes have happened the past. (If, for instance, 1 second Bob seemingly remembers having slashed the tires of an ungrateful student, he is *prima facie* justified in feeling responsible for that act.) As I see things, he’s on par with me, “Regular Bob”, in that regard.

The above description of 1 second Bob, if coherent, establishes that a Reductionist version of the Narrative Account is *possible*. But would such a version of the Narrative Account be *preferable* to Schechtman’s Non-Reductionist version? I think that it would be and, in closing this section, I’ll briefly say why. One advantage is that a Reductionist version of the Narrative Account can borrow an array of pre-existing Reductionist resources with regard to fission cases.[[38]](#endnote-38) A *non-Reductive* version of the Narrative Account, in contrast, needs to come up with an entirely new response to fission cases.[[39]](#endnote-39) In addition, David Shoemaker (2007) has argued that at least some of the four basic features of personal existence (survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation) are best understood in terms of a Reductionist framework that focuses on “reidentifying” persons over time, not Schechtman’s non-Reductionist framework.[[40]](#endnote-40) (Shoemaker targets survival and self-interested concern, in particular.) These arguments, in turn, could serve as additional motivation for pursuing a *Reductionist* version of the Narrative Account.

V. Conclusion

I began this paper with the question of whether a Reductionist account that unifies person stages into persons via their psychological connectedness/continuity can accommodate the “special” attitudes. In exploring this question, I focused upon a specific strategy for justifying these attitudes, one that invokes a broadly Foundationalist epistemology and appeals to diachronic self-experience. I have argued that mere psychological connectedness/continuity between person stages is causally *in*sufficient for generating such an experience—it’s possible for person stages to be psychologically connected to/continuous with one another and yet undergo episodic, not diachronic, self-experience. I also argued, however, that participating in the same narrative is causally sufficient for person stages undergoing diachronic self-experience. This new Reductionist Narrative Account was then defended from two objections: one from Strawson, who claims that participating in a narrative is insufficient for diachronic self-experience, and one from Schechtman, who maintains that a single, isolated person stage is incapable of undergoing diachronic self-experience.[[41]](#endnote-41)

References

Brink, D. 1997. Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons, in J. Dancy (ed.), *Reading Parfit*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 96-134.

Carroll, J. and Markosian, N. 2010. Personal Identity, in Carroll, J. and Markosian, H. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 103-32.

Chalmers, D. 1996. *The Conscious Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Christman, J. 2004. Narrative Unity as a Condition of Personhood. *Metaphilosophy 35*, p. 695-713.

Jackson, F. 1998. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: a Defense of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, D. 1976. Survival and Identity, in A. Rorty (ed.), *The Identities of Persons*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 17-40.

MacIntyre, A. 1984. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press.

Noonan, H. 1989. *Personal Identity*. London: Routledge Press.

Olson, E. 1997. *The Human Animal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parfit, D. 1982. Personal Identity and Rationality. *Synthese* 53, p. 227-41.

Parfit, D. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pryor, J. 2001. Highlights of Recent Epistemology. *British Journal for Philosophy of Science* 52, p. 95-124.

Rudd, A. 2009. In Defense of Narrative. *European Journal of Philosophy 17*, p. 60-75.

Russell, B. 1921. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Schechtman, M. 1996. *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Schechtman, M. 2001. Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity. *Philosophical Explorations* *4(2)*, p. 95-111.

Schechtman, M. 2007. Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 60*, p. 155-78.

Schechtman, M. 2011. The Narrative Self, in S. Gallagher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 394-416.

Shoemaker, D. 1999. Selves and Moral Units. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 80*, p. 391-419.

Shoemaker, D. 2007. Personal Identity and Practical Concerns. *Mind 116*, p. 317-57.

Shoemaker, D. 2012. Personal Identity and Ethics, in E.N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition). URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-ethics/>.

Shoemaker, S. 2009. Review of Selves. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24233-selves-an-essay-in-revisionary-metaphysics/>

Stokes, P. 2011. Is Narrative Identity Four-Dimensionalist? *European Journal of Philosophy 20*, p. 86-106.

Strawson, G. 2004. Against Narrativity, *Ratio 16*, p. 428-52. Reprinted in Strawson, G. 2008. *Real Materialism*. Oxford: Oxford Press, p. 189-208.

Strawson, G. 2007. Episodic Ethics, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 60*, p. 85-116. Reprinted in G. Strawson 2008. *Real Materialism*. Oxford: Oxford Press, p. 209-32.

Strawson, G. 2009. *Selves*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swinburne, R. 1984. Personal Identity: the Dualist Account, in S. Shoemaker and R. Swinburne, *Personal Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Wollheim, R. 1984. *The Thread of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

1. For some worries about framing the problem of personal identity in this way, see Olson 1997. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This is a simplified definition of “Reductionism”. Parfit (1984), for instance, packs more into the notion of “Reductionism” than just the claim that persons are reducible to aggregates of person stages. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. There is more to Parfit’s definition of personal identity than just psychological continuity: for instance, the psychological continuity in question must also have the right cause and there cannot be “branching” cases. These additional conditions are not going to be important, however, for the arguments of this paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This kind of argument can be extended to “special” attitudes besides that of anticipation. Schechtman (1996), for example, identifies four features of personal existence that any viable theory of personal identity must accommodate: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Early versions of this objection are found among the objections that Butler and Reid made to Locke’s memory theory. Contemporary discussants of the same objection include Derek Parfit (1984), who discusses it under the label “the extreme claim”, Marya Schechtman (1996), who devotes a central chapter to it in her book *The Constitution of Selves*, and David Shoemaker (2007), who highlights and explores some of the methodological assumptions at work in this objection. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See, for instance, Noonan 1989, p. 122-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. I included the qualifier “substantial” to indicate that our phenomenological sense is of ourselves as extending *beyond* the temporal length of a single person stage. I will drop this qualifier in what follows. (For the record, the question of how long a single person stage exists is a vexed one; for some discussion, see Schechtman 1996, Brink 1997 and D. Shoemaker 1999.) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. There are, of course, significant differences between how the details of this idea are filled out by epistemologists. For a recent review, see Pryor 2001. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. I want to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to give a clearer, more detailed description of the character of this kind of self-experience. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. To completely secure the claim, I would need to examine all the other potential phenomenological experiences this feeling could be reduced to and then argue that the feeling cannot, in fact, be so reduced. This is too large of a project for this paper, so I will instead rest content by showing that the feeling in question cannot be reduced to a couple of other phenomenological experiences. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. S. Shoemaker (2009), in contrast, thinks it’s a mistake to read James so literally. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Strawson allows that a single subject can sometimes have diachronic self-experience and other times have episodic self-experience. There is an interesting, but unexplored question here about why subjects have the diachronic and episodic self-experiences they do, *when they do*. For the record, I think the positive account developed in section III could shed some light on this issue. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The nature of this example invites the question of whether Episodics are destined to more hedonistic and less moral more than Diachronics. For an interesting attempt to answer “no” to this question, see Strawson 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. To be clear, there are differences between the memories of Episodics and those of Diachronics, differences that I’ll examine shortly. Right now, the point is simply that, like the rest of us, Episodics *have* memories that purport to be of earlier experiences. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. This point is an echo of the (widely acknowledged) point that the memory theorist cannot define the difference between a real memory and an illusory memory in virtue of whether the seemingly remembered event happened *to me*, on pain of circularity. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The idea that some memories have such an affective character has been emphasized by a number of philosophers and psychologists. Richard Wollheim (1984), for instance, talks of memories having “cogency”, where the latter notion is understood in terms of the remembering subject undergoing the feelings, experiences, and thoughts of the person she remembers. Schechtman (2001) makes use of, and elaborates upon, the same idea in her account of “empathic access”. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. A Reductionist could, for instance, attempt to ground the special attitudes in psychological connectedness/continuity *directly* and not in terms of the ability of the latter to give rise to diachronic self-experience. This is how I read Parfit (1982). A more popular (and related) move is to ground the special attitudes in psychological connectedness/continuity *directly* while conceding that doing so will result in some revisions of those attitudes. For examples of this strategy, see Parfit 1984 and D. Shoemaker 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See, for instance, his 2009, p. 219. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Schechtman (2011) floats the possibility that the kind of consciousness we have of ourselves as being temporally extended entities *in virtue of being self-narrators* differs in its character from the kind of consciousness *non-narrators* have of themselves as being temporally extended entities. I leave the question of whether there is a phenomenological difference between diachronic self-experience that is facilitated/enhanced by narration and diachronic self-experience that is merely the result of biological dispositions for another day. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Rudd (2009) thinks the same thing. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Some claim that a narrative is necessary for *agency*—it’s necessary to render individual actions intelligible (see, for instance, MacIntyre 1984). Schechtman’s work, in contrast, doesn’t put the notion of a “narrative” to work with regard to the issue of agency. Instead, she puts it to work in the context of explaining how temporally distinct mental states can be combined into a unified whole. (See Schechtman 2011 for more on this contrast between herself and MacIntyre.) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. In a survey article on personal identity, Carroll and Markosian (2010) discuss the possibility of a theory that analyzes personal identity in terms of the same, temporally extended consciousness. One of the problems facing this approach is that “…under what circumstances will it be true that x’s consciousness state at t1 and y’s conscious state at t2 are parts of the same consciousness?” (p. 128). As I read her, this is the question Schechtman is trying to answer by appealing to a narrative. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. This is an abbreviated description of Schechtman’s account of co-consciousness; it is detailed enough, however, to suit our purposes. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. I should emphasize that constructing a narrative is not the only way that our sailor might come to experience the remembered event of falling off a boat as having happened to him\*. Recall that my position is that although having a narrative is causally sufficient for undergoing diachronic self-experience, it is not necessary. To return to an earlier point, I can allow that diachronic self-experience could arise in other ways—for instance, there could biological mechanisms that generate it. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See p. 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See p. 200-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. I am indebted to an anonymous referee for pointing out that my response to Strawson’s objection leads to this other objection to Narrative Accounts. For some additional discussions of this other objection, see Strawson 2004, Christman 2004, Schechtman 2007, Rudd 2009, and Stokes 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. I borrow this description from Schechtman 2007, p. 160 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. This example comes from Strawson 2004. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Recall that there are limits to this act of self-creation; I cannot, for instance, make myself George Washington simply by appropriating his narrative. For a discussion of the limits of self-creation from the perspective of a Narrative Account of identity, see Schechtman 1996, p. 119-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. See, for example, Swinburne 1984. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. This is how D. Shoemaker (2012) describes Schechtman’s position. Rudd (2009) interprets that Narrative Account along these same lines. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. As an illustration of the intuitive idea of “non-Reductionism”, the stew analogy concerns me. Within the philosophy of mind, “Reductionism” is often understood in terms of the *a priori* *deducibility* of a description of the reduced properties from a description of the properties to which they are reduced. (See, for example, Chalmers 1996 and Jackson 1998.) Given this understanding of “Reductionism”, it’s not obvious that the overall flavor of the soup cannot be “reduced” to the contribution made by the ingredients; if we knew enough about the ingredients and about how they causally interact with one another, we might well be in a position to *a priori* deduce the overall flavor of the soup. (Due to the “hard problem” of consciousness, we may not be able to *a priori* deduce the phenomenal/subjective taste of the soup. I am ignoring this complication.) It’s possible, of course, that Schechtman has a different conception of “Reductionism” in mind. (I want to thank Brendan O’Sullivan for helping me work through some of the issues raised in this footnote.) [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. In personal correspondence, Schechtman did not disavow this reading. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. This scenario is a modified version of a scenario presented by Russell (1921), who raises the possibility that the Earth is only five minutes old. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. For expositional simplicity, I am acting as though person stages last for 1 second. (See footnote vii.) [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Under some theories of mental content, this claim would be controversial, for according to some theories 1 Second Bob would need a causal or biological history in order for his brain states to carry mental content. I ignore this complication in what follows. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. If, for example, person stages are construed as temporal parts of persons, the Reductionist version of the Narrative Account I have sketched can co-opt David Lewis’ (1976) solution to fission cases. A Narrative Account could also co-opt Parfit’s ideas about identity not mattering; under a Narrative Account, it would be “narrative continuity”, not “psychological continuity”, that “really matters”. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. In his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on personal identity and ethics, David Shoemaker also raises the question of how Schechtman’s theory can handle such cases. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Schechtman (1996) rejects the “reidentification” conception of the problem of personal identity for what she calls the “characterization” conception of it—i.e., the problem of saying what makes an action, an experience, etc. an action, an experience *of a given person*. (What’s important about the “characterization” conception, for our purposes, is that it does *not* involve reidentifying one and the same person at different times.) [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. I want to thank an anonymous referee from the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, David Cole, Jason Ford, Brendan O’Sullivan, Marya Schechtman, Jeanine Schroer, Sean Drysdale Walsh, and the student members of the Socratic Society at the University of Minnesota-Duluth for comments on earlier drafts and for many informal discussions about the ideas contained therein. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Marya Schechtman for getting me interested in the topic of personal identity, for helping shepherd me through graduate school and the early stages of my professional career, and for the clarity and quality of her own work on this topic. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)