A Narrative Pattern-Theory of the Self

MURIEL LEUENBERGER
University of Oxford, United Kingdom
muriel.leuenberger@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

Building on the account of a pattern-theory of self introduced by Shaun Gallagher, this article investigates the unique role of the narrative dimension of the self within the self-pattern. According to a pattern-theory, the self is constituted by a cluster of dimensions that interact with each other. A particular variation of this pattern constitutes a self. This article advances the argument that for selves who narrate, the narrative dimension of the self takes a special role that cuts across the other dimensions. First, the pattern-theory of self is introduced and a conceptual and ethical argument for employing a pattern-theory is developed. Second, the distinct role of the narrative dimension of the self is analysed. Through the narrative dimension of the self, we engage in self-definition, integrate and connect the other dimensions of the self, make them intelligible, and ascribe personal meaning to them. And third, the narrator type of self is characterized. Organizing one's experiences through a self-narrative changes the self. Narrators constitute a unified self, they can actively plan and lead a life and engage in forensic practices, and they integrate the subjective and objective nature of the self.

1. Introduction

Philosophy offers a broad range of suggestions on how best to explain and define the self—from the self as a moral agent, to a self as an experiential subject, a physical individual, a mental entity, or a social construct. One of the more recent additions to the debate is the pattern-theory of self (PTS). Inspired by pattern-theories of emotions (Izard and Ackerman 2002; Izard 2013; Mendonça 2012; Newen, Welpinghus and Juckel 2015), Shaun Gallagher (Gallagher 2013; Gallagher and Daly 2018) introduces the pattern-theory of self[1] as an interdisciplinary approach that accounts for the neural as well as the embodied and enactive nature of the self. According to a PTS, the self emerges from a cluster of dimensions that interact with each other dynamically. Instead of reducing the self to one aspect, PTS understands the different theories of the self as compatible. The patterned self encompasses embodied, minimal experiential, affective, behavioral, intersubjective, cognitive, reflective, narrative, extended/situated, and normative elements (Gallagher and Daly 2018). None of those dimensions is by itself necessary or essential to a particular self but PTS remains open to the possibility that a subgroup of aspects of the self may be jointly sufficient or necessary to constitute a self.

[1] Gallagher avoids the expression 'the self' to emphasize that the different aspects of self do not simply modify something that has its own independent existence (Gallagher 2013).

In the following, I argue that for individuals who narrate, the narrative dimension takes a special role within the patterned self as an organizing and self-defining principle. It is not but one element among others but cuts across the other dimensions of the self. Through the narrative dimension of the self, we engage in self-definition, integrate and connect the other dimensions of the self, make them intelligible, and ascribe personal meaning to them. Gallagher and others have already pointed to the unique role of the narrative dimension in retrieving, disclosing, mapping, and connecting the other aspects (Daly and Gallagher 2019; Dings and de Bruin 2022; Gallagher and Daly 2018). They have argued that through the narrative, we can track the dynamical relations among the different dimensions of the self which can be particularly useful in the medical context to diagnose and treat patients with mental disorders. This article expands on this work by giving a more comprehensive argument for and analysis of the role of the narrative in PTS, as well as by characterizing the narrating self.

In this article, I proceed in three steps. First, I provide a more detailed introduction of the PTS and argue for a PTS on the basis of conceptual and ethical considerations. Second, I introduce the narrative dimension of the self and argue that it takes a special role within PTS because it allows for self-definition, integration, intelligibility, and ascription of meaning. Third, I characterize the narrator type of self as a unified self who can lead their life and engage in forensic practices and who integrates the subjective and objective nature of the self in the self-narrative.

2. Pattern-theory of self

According to a pattern-theory, what we call a 'self' is a cluster concept (Gallagher 2013). The self is constituted by a cluster of dimensions that interact with each other. Those variables can take a different value and weight in the dynamic constitution of selves. Changes to one dimension may cause modulations in others. A particular variation of this pattern constitutes a self, which may also change over time for an individual. A self is a complex system that emerges from the dynamic interactions of those constituents. It is not reducible to any one of these aspects. However, a sufficient number of self-dimensions is necessary to constitute a self. In a more recent paper than the one introducing PTS, Gallagher and Daly (Gallagher and Daly 2018) suggest a revised list of dimensions of the self:

1. Embodied elements: Core biological, ecological, and interoceptive factors, allowing the system to distinguish between itself and what is not itself.
2. Minimal experiential elements: First-person, pre-reflective, conscious experience, reflecting the self/non-self distinction, including a sense of ownership ('mineness') and a sense of agency for one's actions.
3. Affective aspects: Affect/emotion/temperament, ranging from bodily affects to what may be a typical affective or emotion pattern.
4. Behavioral aspects: Behaviors and actions make us who we are—behavioral habits reflect, and perhaps actually constitute, our character.

5. Intersubjective interactions and capacities: Humans are born with a capacity for attuning to intersubjective existence, which develops into a social self-consciousness.
6. Psychological/cognitive elements: May range from explicit self-consciousness to a conceptual understanding of self as self, personality traits, psychological continuity, and memory.
7. Reflective capacities: The ability to reflect on one's experiences and actions—closely related to the notions of autonomy and moral personhood.
8. Narrative capacities: Our self-interpretations have a narrative structure.
9. Extended/situated elements: Not only may we identify with our material belongings, the technologies we use, our professions, and the institutions we work in, but we are dynamically related to the action possibilities they afford.
10. Normative factors: Ranging across possibilities presented by the kind of family structure and situation in which we grew up to cultural and normative practices, involving physical and mental health, gender, race, and economic status, that define our way of living.

Those ten elements are presented as a tentative list of dimensions that may contribute to constituting a self.[2] It depicts a schema of possible pattern theories of self. On the basis of this list, we may identify some dimensions as necessary or sufficient to constitute a specific type of self or analyze which elements contribute to the self of a single individual and how they interact with each other. In case someone no longer exhibits a dimension of the self (for instance, if they lose narrative capacities), they do not experience a complete loss of the self but rather a modulation. Their self-identity may continue to be supported by other dimensions of the self, such as minimal bodily and experiential aspects, as well as intersubjective relations or extended aspects in one's surroundings. An individual may lack some of the characteristic features of the self and still constitute a self.

An advantage of PTS is that it understands various accounts of the self, such as the self as a moral agent, an experiential subject, a physical individual, or a mental entity, as compatible instead of in opposition (Gallagher 2013). Its modular, flexible structure allows us to analyze a broad range of elements of the self and the relationships and interactions between them. The narrative self theory, for instance, has been accused of neglecting the importance of minimal experiential elements for the self (Zahavi 2007). A PTS can do justice to the different dimensions of the self without having to reduce the self to any one of them.

A further conceptual advantage of PTS is that it allows for a more sensible and nuanced application to marginal cases such as toddlers, individuals with a mental disability, or some non-human animals. Marginal cases can make it difficult to determine when to apply concepts like 'self' or 'person'. As DeGrazia argues for personhood (DeGrazia 1997), picking one of the typical characteristics, such as moral agency, autonomy, subject of experience, or self-awareness, as crucial seems arbitrary. Moreover, those characteristics do not seem to be all-or-nothing properties but are themselves multidimensional

[2] I remain neutral on whether this list is accurate or complete.

and gradational. There are, for instance, different kinds of self-awareness and they come in degrees (DeGrazia 1997). Both person and self are vague concepts that do not let us decide non arbitrarily in every case whether they apply to an individual. Defining the self in terms of a pattern theory does justice to this vagueness. It also allows us to understand in what sense an individual is a self or which typical characteristics of selves are lacking.

Ethical considerations also speak in favor of a broad conception of the self. The self as well as personhood which is a closely related concept and sometimes even used interchangeably are what we may consider 'thick concepts' (DeGrazia 1997; Gunnarsson 2008; Williams 2006). This means they are both descriptive *and* normative. To be a self or a person one must fulfill certain descriptive conditions, such as exhibiting a sufficient number of characteristic self-dimensions. But being a self or a person also comes with an exclusive or superior moral status. We treat selves and persons differently than beings we do not consider as constituting selfhood or personhood. The descriptive and normative dimensions of the concept are interrelated—the moral status is granted because the descriptive features apply. Even though some authors defending more restrictive definitions of self or person assure that the lives of non-persons or non-selves are not inferior (see, for instance, Schechtman 1996), we should nonetheless be aware of the normative power that comes with denying that someone is a person or a self. Think concepts do not shed their normative dimension that easily. Overly narrow conceptions of selves and persons can lead to undesirable ethical implications (e.g., that people with mental disabilities or toddlers have inferior moral status). Especially in light of the vagueness of the concept, it seems risky to create narrow conceptual boundaries with potentially severe ethical implications on seemingly arbitrary grounds. A PTS allows us to establish different types of selves constituted by specific types of self-patterns. The distinction between different types of selves can be used as a conceptual tool in a more fine-grained moral landscape of how different types of selves should be treated and what rights they have based on the descriptive features that apply to them (for instance, I will argue that a subset of narrator type selves can enter into binding commitments and contracts).

3. A narrative pattern-theory of the self

Having considered the definition and advantages of a PTS, I turn to the role of the narrative dimension of selves. In philosophy, narrativism has been developed as a neo-Lockean response to the persistence question (i.e., what does it take for a person to exist at two different times). Narrative identity theorists argue that the self is narrative in form. Versions of the narrative self view have been developed by Marya Schechtman, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur, David Velleman, Jerome Bruner, and Daniel Dennett, among others (Bruner 1990; Dennett 1992; MacIntyre 1984; Ricoeur 1991; Schechtman 1996; Taylor 1989; Velleman 2006). Furthermore, there is abundant literature on narrativism in psychology (Fivush, Habermas, Waters and Zaman 2011; McAdams 1992; McAdams 2011; McLean, Pasupathi and Pals 2007; Singer 2004). In contrast to the narrative self view, according to a PTS, narratives are not necessary and sufficient for constituting a self. Some selves do not narrate. But, as

will be argued in the following, the narrative dimension takes a special role that cuts across the other dimensions of the self.

The general idea of narrativism is that narrators integrate their experiences into an evolving, internalized life story and project themselves into narratives of the future. This self-narrative is a story telling one's life-events from a personal perspective, reflecting character traits, goals, and values. The self-narrative defines the self on an individual, characterizing level, answering the question 'what makes me *me*?'. It is more than just a chronology of life events, or a neutral list of all the experiences of one's life. A self-narrative is selective and reflects personal evaluations. The stories of our lives are colored by our views on what occurred. Since your view on your past and future can change, we should understand the narrative dimension of selves as an ongoing process of self-interpretation and self-definition. A person may have thought that he was very confident and tough or that being from Scotland is an important part of his identity, but later in life came to understand that he acted out of insecurity or considers his Scottish origins as accidental and not self-defining.

The self-narrative is both explicit and implicit. We explicitly give an account of who we are or what we do to others and ourselves in terms of a narrative. In doing so, we summarize, abridge, highlight, find repeating patterns, or combine a span of weeks or years into a distinctive period (Glover 1988). Through such accounts, we make sense of ourselves and our actions and communicate it to others. When making the self-narrative explicit to others or to ourselves, we do not just express the implicit self-narrative we already had but we reflect on and make decisions about who we take ourselves to be and the intentions and responsibilities of our actions. At the same time, the self-narrative is implicit in the sense that our awareness of where we come from and expect to go shapes the experience of the present moment even if we are not explicitly or consciously considering the self-narrative. Parts we have made explicit before but are not consciously present at the moment as well as inchoate, vague notions of our life trajectory that have never been made explicit shape our experience implicitly and provide the framework through which we interpret, evaluate, and filter our experiences. Thereby, the self-narrative provides an individual, phenomenological point of view. For example, a person winning a marathon is experiencing this moment not in isolation but connected to the hours she put in the training and her ambitions for the future. Even if she does not reflect on the hours of training or her future goals at this moment, the implicit awareness of her life trajectory forms this experience.

For individuals who narrate, the narrative dimension is not just one among the other aspects of the patterned self. It cuts across the other dimensions and serves as an organizing and self-defining principle. How and to what degree the individual dimensions contribute to defining the self is shaped by the self-narrative. As argued in the following, the self-narrative takes this role because through it we engage in self-definition, integrate different features of the self, make them intelligible, and ascribe meaning. For non-narrators, the remaining aspects of the self can support their self-identity and the narratives others construe about them can partially fulfill the functions of self-definition, integration, intelligibility, and meaning for them. The narrative dimension of the self depends itself on other aspects

of the self. It certainly requires minimal experiential and cognitive elements, but likely also embodied, situated, reflective, and interpersonal aspects. This article does not investigate how the other dimensions of the patterned self contribute to making the construction of a self-narrative possible. Instead, it is focused on the mechanisms of how the self-narrative organizes and shapes the self across all dimensions as well as how having a narrative shapes the self to identify what characterizes narrating selves.

3.1 Self-definition

Not all your actions, characteristics, and life-events are equally defining you. Some elements are considered merely accidental, as in the above example of the Scottish origin, whereas others are central to one's identity. For some, being a philosopher is a central part of who they take themselves to be, for others it's just a way to pay the bills. What is part of the self is to some degree a matter of interpretation. The hard facts about yourself, such as where you were born, the things you did in your life, or how you look like, do not define your identity in its entirety (Leuenberger 2020). They leave ample room for different interpretations, emphasis, and choices about relevance. A child, friend, spouse, or mother of someone likely construes a very different but potentially equally true narrative of this person. They would all emphasize different elements and interpret some actions or emotions differently while remaining true to the hard facts. The narrative of the individual itself is the one that matters for self-definition because it guides her actions (Velleman 2006) and shapes her first-personal perspective (Schechtman 1996).[3] His mother might see him as a talented artist but as long as he does not see himself as an artist, he will not pursue a career in arts or look at galleries as a potential space to exhibit his work.

In construing a self-narrative, you take an active role in defining yourself. Through narrative accounts of yourself and your actions, you make choices about what defines you. For example, someone might be explaining to her friend that her aggressive outbursts weren't really her because they were caused by a tumor. In this narrative account of what caused her actions, she defines herself across multiple dimensions of the self. She rejects the tumor as part of her embodied self and she decides that certain behavior and emotions are not a real part of herself. Self-definition through narratives cuts across the other dimensions of the self and determines which elements belong to them or to what degree they are part of those dimensions. By giving accounts of who we are and what we do, we define ourselves, decide what is important and what is irrelevant about ourselves, and create, embrace, or reject interpretations of ourselves.

3.2 Integration

As argued by Dings and de Bruin (Dings and de Bruin 2022), narrativity constitutes the highest level of integration for an agent or cognitive system. Narratives provide temporal integration, by connecting

[3] This leaves a lot open concerning self-definition for cases of delusional self-narratives which commit errors of facts or errors of interpretation. I do not have the space to cover this topic here. Schechtman's work on the reality constraint is discussing those issues extensively (Schechtman 1996).

past, present, and future. Through the self-narrative, we represent ourselves as diachronic, as being at a certain point in an ongoing life. Temporally separated episodes of our lives are held together through a narrative that connects them and they are extended into the future through narrative projections of how we expect our lives to develop. Having a self-narrative means experiencing present moments as tensed moments that expand into the personal past and future. Not everyone is experiencing this temporal integration to the same degree (e.g., Strawson's episodics (Strawson 2008)), and not every situation lends itself equally to experiencing its temporal extension. Nonetheless, through the self-narrative we are implicitly and explicitly situating ourselves along a life trajectory and integrate the episodes of our lives into it.

Narratives can furthermore provide integration by identifying patterns and structures. An individual can identify a pattern of helpful behavior and continue to interpret and account for their actions through their identified trait of helpfulness. Other patterns and structures identified in self-narratives would be life periods (angsty teenage years, punk-rock phase, or a period of depression), social roles, or cultural influences (e.g., 'I keep falling into patriarchal patterns of thought'). In identifying and defining those patterns and structures, we connect features of ourselves across the dimensions of the PTS. The punk-rock phase integrates elements of behavior (listening to this music genre, going to concerts), embodiment (e.g., a fashion style or physical reaction to the music), intersubjectivity (a circle of like-minded friends), values, beliefs, and more into a coherent element of one's identity.

Similarly, self-narratives can integrate elements with different degrees of abstraction and specificity. They can connect single actions to overarching goals, a single behavior to a repeating character disposition, or an isolated feeling of affection to a relationship of love and care. Narratives allow us to zoom in on specific actions, thoughts, or emotions and consider their details as well as to zoom out to more abstract features of the self. In the self-narrative, those levels are integrated and connected such that the specific aspects can be understood as exemplifying the abstract ones.

3.3 Intelligibility

Through the self-narrative, actions are made intelligible (Butler 2001; MacIntyre 1984; Velleman 2003). To modify an example by MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1984), if I ask you why you are reading this article, you may reply that you are an academic researching the topic, that you just stumbled upon it and do not have anything better to do, or that you read it to count all the spelling errors. To understand what you are doing, we have to know the causal and temporal order of short- and long-term intentions and beliefs (do you want to write a paper on the topic or just fill the time until dinner) as well as the cultural and social framework structuring the action (e.g., what is academia) (MacIntyre 1984). This means we are telling a story. We have to embed actions in narratives to understand them.

Making an action intelligible also entails understanding how the different dimensions of the self impact our actions. By integrating the different dimensions of the self into the self-narrative, we come

to understand how they influence what we do. In construing narratives such as how his constant back pain makes him grumpy and lash out at his friends, how he hopes to impress his colleagues by talking about a prize he won, or how he avoids mowing the lawn on Sundays because it is frowned upon in his cultural context, he connects embodied, intersubjective, cultural, and other dimensions of himself to his actions such that actions and what influences them are rendered intelligible. This allows us to understand the impact of different dimensions of the self on our lives, to reflect on them and to try to change or abandon some aspects of those dimensions. Only if we understand our actions and what causes them are we in a position to manage them. This means the self-narrative provides crucial conditions that allow us to manage the different features of the patterned self and thereby ourselves.

3.4 Meaning

The final reason the narrative aspect of the self takes a special role for narrators is that we ascribe personal meaning to events, beliefs, values, traits, embodiment, and other aspects of ourselves through narratives (Bruner 1990; Leuenberger 2021). Personal meaning refers to the subjective value or relevance something has for the individual. The events and aspects of our lives gain their personal meaning through their position in the self-narrative. By integrating events into a self-narrative, they receive the necessary context of intentions, beliefs, personal history, and institutional settings to be meaningful. What it means for someone to win a marathon depends on whether she trained for this her whole life, whether she just participated on a whim, or whether this is her last run before retiring as a professional athlete. This moment becomes personally meaningful only in light of the narrative of her life.

Besides providing context, narratives provide intentionality. Through narratives, we account for events in intentional terms, i.e., in terms of intentions, beliefs, emotions, and cultural settings. In contrast, a purely naturalistic, reductionistic description of an event cannot depict its meaning. For instance, the personal meaning of a person's belief in God cannot be grasped through the underlying physical and biochemical processes, such as the neural activation pattern. To make sense of the personal meaning of this belief, we need to know how it connects to their values and other beliefs, what they have given up or gained through it, or what its cultural significance is. The intentional, contextual, and diachronic perspective of a narrative is needed to ascribe subjective value (i.e., meaning). Taking this narrative perspective on one's life impacts the self on a phenomenological level. The moment of winning the marathon in the above example is meaningful because it is not experienced in isolation but as a point in an ongoing life. To ascribe personal meaning and to experience moments as meaningful, this perspective that connects past, present, and future in intentional and contextual terms is necessary.

In the context of the PTS, the self-narrative ascribes meaning and relevance to the different dimensions of the self. What your body, gender, moods, friendships, character traits, or behavior mean for you in an individual, characterizing sense is determined by the narrative in which they are embedded.

Again, the narrative dimension of the self is not just one among the others but determines the personal relevance for all of them.

4. The narrator type of self

So far, I have argued that the narrative dimension of the self serves as an overarching organizing principle by allowing for self-definition, integration, intelligibility, and meaning. Having a self-narrative that takes over all those roles changes the self. This section analyzes how having a narrative shapes you. It provides a characterization of the narrator type of self to pinpoint what distinguishes selves that are constituted by a self-pattern that includes narrative elements—selves who take a narrative perspective and organize their experiences through a story of their lives. I argue that we can identify three characteristics of the narrator type of self: the self is unified through the narrative, narrators can lead their lives and engage in forensic practices and the subjective and objective nature of the self are brought together in the narrative.

4.1 Unified self

Through a self-narrative, the self is unified in two ways. It construes unity as persistence, meaning unity across time, and unity as oneness, meaning unity across the different dimensions of the self (Schramme 2014). The self-narrative construes unity as persistence by integrating different moments and periods of one's life into a bigger whole. It provides a perspective of oneself as being at a certain point in an ongoing life. Thereby, the stages of this life are understood as parts of a unified self that spans from birth to death (and some construe narrative projections beyond death). This temporal unification through the narrative perspective might only be a construction and not a metaphysical truth (I leave this question open). But it has far-reaching practical consequences for how we can and do lead our lives, as I will discuss in the next section (see also Schechtman 2008).

Furthermore, through narration, the self is unified in the sense that different aspects of the self are brought together to make sense in light of each other as part of one. The single dimensions of the self are part of a bigger whole emerging from the self-narrative through which they become intelligible. The raised heart rate when holding a presentation in front of colleges only makes sense if it is part of a self that integrates, for instance, intersubjective dimensions of work relationships, normative and cultural dimensions connected to institutions of employment, and the psychological dimension of being shy or insecure. Self-narratives create a bigger whole by providing structures of interpretation—a network of meaning and intelligibility—that make you into a unified self that is persisting and one. Of course, we also have a certain physical unity. You are one organism throughout your lifetime who is distinct from others. But through the self-narrative, we construe coherence and unity in a broader sense, that integrates those purely bodily aspects with the intentional level of goals, values, aspirations, and characteristics. In the case of multiple personality disorder, for instance, an individual is unified as an embodied self but not in the sense of the individual characterizing self that defines what makes me *me.*

4.2 Leading a life and forensic practices

The self-narrative allows for a particular kind of self-understanding and engagement with the world: as an agent that actively plans and leads their life. Through the phenomenological perspective of the self-narrative, the present moment is experienced in relation to the past and the anticipated future. We experience this diachronicity to different degrees, depending on idiosyncratic characteristics as well as the nature of the experience. The experience of absentmindedly scratching your head is not colored by your self-narrative in the same way as when you win a marathon you spent years training for. In the marathon case, the self-narrative gives depth and meaning to the experience it would lack without the narrative background. In a comparatively meaningless moment of your life, when you just sit and scratch your head, the narrative perspective lets you know how you got to be where you are and sets expectations of what happens in the future. Sometimes we may lose this narrative connection when we walk into a room and forget why and some mental disorders can lead to a more severe lack of narrative, diachronic organization (Mackenzie and Poltera 2010).

Narrators come to see themselves as temporally extended subjects whose histories impact the present and whose choices and current circumstances will influence the future. In the self-narrative, we represent ourselves as diachronic, as aging. Only if I think of myself as a diachronic entity, it makes sense to actively plan and lead my life, take responsibility for past actions, or hold special concern for my own future (Schechtman 1996). The perception of oneself as an agent shapes the self as a subject (Schechtman 2011). Because we represent ourselves as ageing, we have to somehow manage this ongoing life as we age, using these coordinating self-representations (Taylor 2011). You want to know who you are and construe self-defining narratives not just out of curiosity but because your life is given to you as something you undertake. This is why it is important to know whether you really are a philosopher or not, whether this reflects your norms, goals, and desires because you have to make choices based on who you take yourself to be. Moreover, by projecting ourselves into the future through a narrative, the self-narrative is action-guiding. We try to enact the imagined futures suggested by the self-narrative (McConnell 2016; Velleman 2006). Taking this integrative, diachronic, and meaning-generating narrative perspective generates a qualitatively different experience that allows us to understand ourselves as ongoing agents engaged in meaningful activities and thereby constituting the self.

If the individual furthermore adheres to the reality and articulation constraints, as introduced by Schechtman (Schechtman 1996), they ‘unlock’ another set of (inter)actions: social, forensic practices concerned with responsibility and accountability. To adhere to the reality constraint, the self-narrative should fundamentally cohere with a shared understanding of reality. Holding each other accountable or entering into binding commitments or contracts requires common ground. With individuals who do not have a solid grasp of reality and with whom we do not share some very basic assumptions of how the world works, we do not enter into a contract, hold them accountable, or see them as deserving blame or

praise for their actions (at least not in the same way). A highly delusional self-narrative prevents the individual from engaging in certain social practices. Someone who believes, for example, that he is Napoleon may have construed a unifying, though delusional, narrative self through which he can ascribe meaning to life-events, actions, and emotions and which he uses to try to make himself intelligible. But he cannot successfully navigate his life and we would not assign responsibility to him or bind him to his promises (Schechtman 1996). The articulation constraint requires that at least parts of the self-narrative can be made explicit, meaning the individual can explain why she is performing this action, feeling this feeling, or holding this belief. To be held accountable we have to be able to give an account of ourselves. Of course, whether one meets the reality and articulation constraints is gradual and may be temporary. Insofar as narrators construe their self-narratives within these constraints they can engage in such forensic practices.

The reality and articulation constraints are not required for the self-narrative to allow for self-definition, integration, intelligibility, meaning, unity, and the integration of the subjective and objective nature of the self. To fulfill those functions, the self-narrative needs to provide a phenomenological point of view that positions the self as being at a certain point in an ongoing life and comes with structures of interpretation. This only requires a minimal coherence with reality (most importantly, the self-narrative needs to be the story of a life and it has to feature the individual's perspective). The details of this minimal requirement are too complex to work out at this point, but it would be weaker than the reality and articulation constraints. The narrative dimension of the self as I have discussed it in this article does not necessarily describe your 'true' or 'real' self in a deep metaphysical sense. It constitutes the dimension of the self (together with and across the other aspects of the self) through which we experience, organize, and engage with the world. Insofar as this self-dimension has far-reaching, real-life consequences there is a reality to it, but I do not engage with the metaphysical question of how this relates to one's 'true self'.

4.3 Subjective and objective

Lastly, I want to argue that the narrator type of self can make sense of the subjective and objective duality of the self. Nagel famously argued that by giving an objective account of the self, its subjective nature is lost. We cannot account for the subjective point of view through an objective viewpoint. 'Any attempt to conceive persons completely as a kind of thing in the world persisting through time will come up against this obstacle. The self that appears to the subject seems to disappear under external analysis.' (Nagel 2012) The narrator self is fundamentally subjective due to the phenomenological point of view constituted by the narrative perspective. The narrative self constitutes the subjective framework through which we experience and engage with the world (Postan 2016; Schechtman 1996). At the same time, we regularly give third-personal, objective accounts of ourselves in the self-narrative. We often describe our bodies, actions, emotions, behavior, and character traits from an objective stance.

Narrators take the role of the protagonist, the author (or more realistically, co-author), and the critic of the self-narrative at the same time (Schechtman 2011). In the role of the protagonist and the author, you take the subjective position of experiencing life through the point of view shaped by the self-narrative and of making decisions and acting them out from the subjective perspective. But you are also a critic who reflects on his or her life, tries to make sense of it, and ascribes meaning to it. In this role as a critic, you take an objective perspective on yourself. Narrators combine the subjective and objective nature of the self through the different perspectives ingrained in the narrative.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, let me briefly summarize the argument of the article. Conceptual and ethical considerations speak in favor of understanding the self as constituted by a dynamic pattern of variables. For selves who narrate, the narrative dimension serves as an organizing principle. It can take this role because 1) through the self-narrative you define yourself across other dimensions of the self, 2) the self-narrative integrates the self temporally, by identifying patterns and structures, and across degrees of abstraction, 3) it allows us to understand and manage the different dimension of the self, and 4) through the self-narrative we ascribe personal meaning to other elements of the self. Thereby, the narrative dimension of the self is revealed to be crucial for the constitution of the dimension of self through which we experience, organize, and engage with the world. The narrator type of self is characterized as constituting a unified self (as persistence and as oneness) who actively plans and leads their life and may engage in forensic practices, and who accounts for the subjective and objective nature of the self.

The narrative pattern-theory of the self laid out in this article raises important ethical questions about how others may support or disrupt the functions and roles of self-narratives for the self. In this article, I have not touched upon the topic of how others influence the self-narrative but of course, we do not create narratives in isolation. The social context is required to develop capacities for self-narration (Fivush, Habermas, Waters and Zaman 2011; McAdams 2011; McAdams 2013), we make ourselves intelligible and give an account of ourselves to others in narrative terms (Brison 2002; Butler 2001; Schechtman 1996; Velleman 2006), we define ourselves through our relations with others and by being part of social and cultural groups (Baylis 2012; Lindemann 2001; MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989), others shape what can be considered as meaningful characteristics of a person (Taylor 2003), and others provide inputs and constraints for our self-narratives (Baylis 2012; Fivush, Habermas, Waters and Zaman 2011; Lindemann 2001; Lindemann 2016; McConnell 2016; Mihailov, Zorila and Iftode 2021; Schechtman 1996; Schechtman 2014). In view of what the narrative dimension of the self allows us to do and how it shapes the self, it is important to consider how others may impact our abilities for self-definition, integration, personal intelligibility, and ascription of meaning. Moreover, further empirical and conceptual research is necessary to work out in more detail how the other elements of the patterned self interact with and are impacted by the narrative dimension, notably which aspects are necessary to construe a narrative, as well as how this theory of the self can be used in the applied context, particularly

in the medical field to improve how we define, diagnose, and provide treatment for individuals suffering from disorders of the self. This analysis of the role of the narrative dimension of the self and the narrator type of self can serve as a starting point for this research.[4]

6. References

Baylis, Françoise 2012: 'The Self in Situ: A Relational Account of Personal Identity'. In *Being Relational: Reflections on Relational Theory and Health Law*. Downie, Jocelyn and Llewellyn, Jennifer J. (eds) Vancouver: UBC Press, pp. 109-31

Brison, Susan J. 2002: *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Bruner, Jerome S. 1990: *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Butler, Judith 2001: 'Giving an Account of Oneself'. *Diacritics*, 31, pp. 22-40

Daly, Anya and Gallagher, Shaun 2019: 'Towards a phenomenology of self-patterns in psychopathological diagnosis and therapy'. *Psychopathology*, 52, pp. 33-49

DeGrazia, David 1997: 'Great apes, dolphins, and the concept of personhood'. *The Southern journal of philosophy*, 35, pp. 301-20

Dennett, Daniel 1992: 'The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity'. In *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*. Kessel, Frank S., Cole, Pamela M. and Johnson, Dale L. (eds) Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, pp. 103-15

Dings, Roy and de Bruin, Leon C. 2022: 'What's Special About 'Not Feeling Like Oneself'? A Deflationary Account of Self(-illness) Ambiguity'. *Philosophical Explorations*, pp. 1-21

Fivush, Robyn; Habermas, Tilmann; Waters, Theodore E. A. and Zaman, Widaad 2011: 'The Making of Autobiographical Memory: Intersections of Culture, Narratives and Identity'. *International Journal of Psychology*, 46, pp. 321-45

Gallagher, Shaun 2013: 'A Pattern Theory of Self'. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7, pp. 443-43

Gallagher, Shaun and Daly, Anya 2018: 'Dynamical relations in the self-pattern'. *Frontiers in Psychology*, p. 664

Glover, Jonathan 1988: *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity*. London etc.: Penguin Books

Gunnarsson, Logi 2008: 'The Great Apes and the Severely Disabled: Moral Status and Thick Evaluative Concepts'. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 11, pp. 305-26

Izard, Carroll E and Ackerman, Brian P 2002: 'Self-Organization of Discrete Emotions, Emotion Patterns, and Emotion-Cognition'. In *Emotion, development, and self-organization: Dynamic*

4 I would like to thank the participants of the Heidelberg Workshop on Personhood, Self-Consciousness, and the First-Person Perspective for valuable feedback on this article.

systems approaches to emotional development. Lewis, S. E. and Granic, I. (eds) New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 15

Izard, Carrolle E 2013: *Patterns of emotions: A new analysis of anxiety and depression*. New York: Academic Press

Leuenberger, Muriel 2020: 'In Defense of Narrative Authenticity'. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 29, pp. 656 - 67

—— 2021: 'Losing Meaning: Philosophical Reflections on Neural Interventions and their Influence on Narrative Identity'. *Neuroethics*, 14, pp. 491–505

Lindemann, Hilde 2001: *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

—— 2016: *Holding and letting go: The social practice of personal identities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

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

Mackenzie, Catriona and Poltera, Jacqui 2010: 'Narrative Integration, Fragmented Selves, and Autonomy'. *Hypatia*, 25, pp. 31-54

McAdams, Dan P. 1992: 'Unity and purpose in human lives: The emergence of identity as a life story'. In *Personality structure in the life course*. Zucker, R. A., Rabin, A.I., Aronoff, J. and Frank, S. J. (eds) New York: Springer, pp. 131-48

—— 2011: 'Narrative identity'. In *Handbook of identity theory and research*. New York: Springer, pp. 99-115

—— 2013: 'The psychological self as actor, agent, and author'. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8, pp. 272-95

McConnell, Doug 2016: 'Narrative Self-Constitution and Recovery from Addiction'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 53, pp. 307-22

—— 2016: 'Narrative Self-constitution and Vulnerability to Co-authoring'. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 37, pp. 29-43

McLean, Kate C; Pasupathi, Monisha and Pals, Jennifer L 2007: 'Selves creating stories creating selves: A process model of self-development'. *Personality and social psychology review*, 11, pp. 262-78

Mendonça, Dina 2012: 'Pattern of sentiment: following a Deweyan suggestion'. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy*, 48, pp. 209-27

Mihailov, Emilian; Zorila, Alexandra and Iftode, Cristian 2021: 'Taking Relational Authenticity Seriously: Neurotechnologies, Narrative Identity, and Co-Authorship of the Self'. *AJOB Neuroscience*, 12, pp. 35-37

Nagel, Thomas 2012: *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Newen, Albert; Welpinghus, Anna and Juckel, Georg 2015: 'Emotion recognition as pattern recognition: the relevance of perception'. *Mind & Language*, 30, pp. 187-208

Postan, Emily 2016: 'Defining Ourselves: Personal Bioinformation as a Tool of Narrative Self-Conception'. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 13, pp. 133-51

Ricoeur, Paul 1991: 'Life in quest of narrative'. In *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. Wood, David (ed) New York: Routledge, pp. 20-33

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

—— 2008: 'Diversity in unity: practical unity and personal boundaries'. *Synthese*, 162, pp. 405-23

—— 2011: 'The Narrative Self'. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*. Gallagher, Shaun (ed) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 394-416

—— 2014: *Staying alive: Personal identity, practical concerns, and the unity of a life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Schramme, Thomas 2014: 'On being wholeheartedly ambivalent: indecisive will, unity of the self, and integration by narration'. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 17, pp. 27-40

Singer, Jefferson A. 2004: 'Narrative identity and meaning making across the adult lifespan: An introduction'. *Journal of personality*, 72, pp. 437-60

Strawson, Galen 2008: 'Against Narrativity'. In *Real Materialism and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 189-207

Taylor, Charles 1989: *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press

—— 2003: *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Taylor, Kenneth 2011: 'The Narrative Construction of the Self'. In The Human Experience [Video file]. University, Stanford (ed) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDSH9Xb_0Ag 05.12.2011

Velleman, J. David 2003: 'Narrative explanation'. *Philosophical Review*, 112, pp. 1-25

—— 2006: *Self to Self: Selected Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Williams, Bernard 2006: *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Zahavi, Dan 2007: 'Self and Other: The Limits of Narrative Understanding'. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 60, pp. 179-202